

Results Are What Counts

Craig A. Eddy



Book 3 of
Except for Thee and Me

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by
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Chapter 1

What a Way to Run a Railroad (Monday afternoon, three weeks later)

“OK, here's the good news,” Ted said, as he came in and sat down. “First, your revolution over here sparked an attempt by the licensing board in America to revoke the licenses of doctors with Envoy techniques. They were asked, politely, if they'd like to disband. They were asked by about five hundred thousand doctors with training in Envoy techniques, armed with lawsuits charging them with criminal activities. The medical licensing board withdrew its attempt.” This set Taylor and Muriel chuckling. “Next, the hospitals made their attempt. This time, the Envoy trained doctors didn't even wait to discuss it. They simply provided evidence in court that the hospitals were actually a means of making money for the board of directors, and not curing people. THOSE cases went through, and the hospitals closed. The doctors immediately regrouped and organized so that the country was covered. Then, there were the pharmaceutical companies. By this time, they were already on the ropes, but hoped to force an issue – namely that the Envoy trained doctors HAD to use their drugs to cure patients. The Envoy trained doctors offered to demonstrate the effectiveness of THEIR methods by infecting the CEOs of the companies with HIV/AIDS, then curing them. The CEOs declined the offer, and the court threw the case out.” That got Taylor and Muriel laughing.

“Maybe we should try that over here,” Muriel said.

“I don't think the courts would be amused,” Taylor said, but he was smiling. “Perhaps keep it lower key and simply SHOW that persons that had been so diagnosed by regular doctors were, in fact, cured by the Envoy techniques.”

“Yea, I guess you're right,” Muriel said. “But it WAS a good idea.”

“Now, for the bad news. Banks are trying to come back by suggesting legislation that would limit government interference with their business,” Ted said. “It's affectionately called HOOB legislation.”

“HOOB legislation?” asked Taylor.

“Hands Off Our Banks,” Ted replied. And Taylor and Muriel again laughed.

“I thought legislation in America had stopped such attempts,” Muriel said.

“Not stopped it. Merely slowed it down, apparently,” Ted replied. “They're trying to show a grass-roots support for such legislation. I don't think it will go well for them, since the grass-roots that they're showing are all bank officers and employees. But it's one to watch.”

“So, you're saying,” Muriel said, “that their gray roots are showing.” Ted choked, and Taylor laughed.

"We may have the answer to that," Taylor said. "Ralph has been following the connections. Every bank that isn't owned by Home has been implicated in funding terrorist activities, either local or foreign, as well as the drug trade. They're dirty. And I mean internationally, not just in Britain. We'll get you the information, so you can work it up from the standpoint of America. We'll be taking further action, shortly, here."

"Well, that's good. Did you reassign Ralph to the Home Special Investigators?" asked Ted.

"Didn't have to. He's always been a Home Special Investigator. He was just assigned to Britain and Taylor. He can switch logos on his hat just as I can," Muriel said.

"Hmm. Any chance that we could borrow him for a bit? Even if it's just a visit to my analysis team to explain what's happening, and maybe to our legal team?" asked Ted.

"I don't see why not," Muriel replied. "He might want to hold off until he has things firmed up a bit more. But Taylor can ask him. It might even give him a better idea of what's going on to look at it from America's point of view."

"Muriel," Ted said, "how's your Grand Experiment going? I know that records are coming into the insurance company, and that's good. But are they really reaching the people."

"Yep. Oh, Aretha worked the tree out a bit further," Muriel said. "It's a case of people knowing other people, further out, that were already trained. So, as she'd get information on an area, she'd call them in and offer them jobs, too. So far, she's reached the borders of Scotland and Wales, and is trying to find contacts inside there. By the way, I think we can just let the pharmaceuticals in this country hang themselves. With the loss of revenue from human style doctors being pushed out, their stock is tanking. They've already tried the 'we're too big to fail' argument, and been laughed at. They tried to force the government to guarantee their profits by suing Taylor. We had the ammunition, and weren't allowed to use it. The courts took one look at their arguments and told them that it wasn't the government's fault that nobody was buying their drugs anymore. Not even the over the counter ones with the exception of some painkillers and salves and bandages. And so it ends . . . not with a bang, but with a whimper."

"So, Aretha's happy?" asked Ted.

"Oh, yea. She's working as a doctor, and got TWO doctors to cover for her for when she goes off to other areas to recruit and set up offices. Well, actually, it's more a case of she fills in with two doctors out of one office when she's there," Muriel said. "But yea, she's happy. And respected by her peers. Why do you ask?"

"Oh," Ted said, "there's a movement in America to try the same thing there. Maybe not handled by Home, but still an attempt. From what I'm hearing, the insurance companies in America are exploring the idea of consolidating, and hiring the doctors directly."

"BAD idea," Muriel said. "Check their background, and look at what their benefits would be. And how they intend to pay the doctors. I'd almost bet that they'd be trying to pay them on a wage basis, and only for the time that they actually take to perform a procedure. And maybe not even that. Maybe only on the time that the insurance company SAYS they should be taking to perform a procedure. Then take a look at what they would charge the customers. They're not talking about nationalization, they're talking about profiteering."

"Interesting. You're the second person that's suggested that," Ted said.

"Oh? Who was first?" asked Muriel.

"Melanie," Ted replied. "And her analysis group is already looking into it. She's asked our Enclave if it would be willing to use its cutouts on the Internet to post the results."

"So, what did you tell her?" asked Muriel.

"Oh, we're doing it," Ted said. "We're also showing the connection between the insurance companies and the banks. I've also got my analysis team working on a projection of amount paid to doctors compared to total premiums paid to insurance companies. The insurance companies gross would go up dramatically. We passed that back to Melanie, and she hit the roof. She's considering criminal charges against the insurance companies if they try that."

"It all seems to go back to the banks," Taylor said. "OK, give me a couple of minutes to see if Ralph would be willing to take his information over. I'll be right back." And a couple of minutes later, "OK, he's gone over. And he took a squad with him. Something about needing to explain some of the connections, so he might not be back for a bit. Anything else we can give you?"

"Nope. Not right now," Ted said. "Unless you can come up with a way to put the banks under some sort of control that they can't get out of."

"We'll work on that," Muriel said. "We've got the same sort of problem, here. They just don't seem to understand that what they're doing is hurting the country. It's why we put Ralph on them to begin with. Well, you saw what he turned up, right off the bat."

"Yea. OH! We got them. For what it's worth, we got the banks that were being fed by that private equity. Frederica is going over the financials, now, and legal is having a field day with the various communications. Alice is getting most of it, since it involves British law. So, don't surprised if she hits you with a bombshell. When's Parliament supposed to start back up?"

"Right now, it looks like a couple of weeks. The last of the elections should be sometime this week," Taylor said. "And I've already had feelers from some of the new members, wanting to know what I've done and why. And NO complaints. The ones I talked to have suggested that they ratify what I've done by edict, just to make the whole thing

incontrovertibly legal. I don't see a problem with that, though I WILL be watching to see how things are worded, and what they might add in."

And, in the American Enclave, Bart looked up to see a man walking toward the office. "People, I think we've got a live one. Take a look at how he's dressed. British, with a cowboy hat?"

"OH!" said the head of the analysis section. "He's here. We're expecting him, Bart. That's Muriel's attack dog for the banks in Britain. Ted said he'd try to get him to come over. We need to make room for him, here." And he added a desk and chair facing the rest of the group.

Ralph never paused as he approached the doors. "Well," Bart said, "I see you're familiar with Muriel. Good morning . . . though I guess it's afternoon for you. I'm Bart, Ted's security chief. Analysis is waiting for you," he added, and led him to the new desk.

"Oh, good. This shouldn't take long. I've asked one of my squads to come and assist. Nothing major, but this may not be formatted in a way that you would understand," Ralph said to the head of the analysis team. "I'm afraid we've been concentrating on the way it affects Britain, then branched out as links took us to other countries." And suddenly, there were five more people standing next to the other desks. "If you need the entire package, I can see that you get it. This is just the American banks that we've come across, as well as the multi-national ones that have offices in your country. The one thing I haven't found, yet, is the lead banks. So, let's see if we can put this information together with yours."

It took a half hour. They used the information on Ralph's tablet as a source, and their computers simply went in and grabbed the bank names and connections, along with supporting information. But it took time to do it that way.

"No offense," said the head of analysis, "but I think we're going to need the rest, too. You've done a major amount of work. Some of it duplicates what we've managed, here. But you've got links outside that seem to go everywhere. Is there a way . . . ?"

"Of course," Ralph said. "But it's not on my tablet. However, I do have a CD of it . . . well, as much as we have so far, anyway. Here you go."

The head of analysis put the disk in his computer, and had it searched, passing the connections on to the rest of the team. "This . . . how did you manage to get all of this?" he asked.

"Oh, Muriel and His Majesty were nice enough to supply me with five teams. One was supposed to be for analysis, and the other four for helping with take-downs and such," Ralph said. "Well, it worked out that all five teams ended up working on it. It would help us if you handled the American side of it, and we coordinated between us. We have noticed some of the links to businesses and insurance companies. I understand from His Majesty that that may be the next thrust, and that you're having trouble with them."

"Well, we're having trouble with the banks, too. The government put some stiff regulations on them, and now they're trying to break free of them," the head of analysis said. "This, though. We'll have to check with legal, but just from what I see there may be a way to hit them with criminal charges. You've pulled in a lot of evidence. Some of it goes to probable cause, which could have us investigating their files. But the rest . . . I can't believe that these people would actually put such stuff in unencrypted emails."

"There is a down side to all of this," Ralph said. "I don't know that Home could take over all these banks. I know you've done it before. But the expense of pulling them all at once may be more than Home can absorb. And the government may not want you to do it. There ARE ways, under British law, that they could be brought under control. But I haven't had the American legal information to be able to say whether this country could. It's one of the reasons that I'd like you to handle it . . . take it off our hands, and just feed information back to us. We would, of course, add in whatever information we come across, back to you."

"It sounds like we've got a deal, then," the head of analysis said. "You've got a larger team to work with. We'll chew on this for a while and see what we come up with, and pass it over to legal."

"Good. Feel free to call on me, anytime . . . um, with the understanding that I AM human, and there is a seven hour difference between us," Ralph grinned. "If it's off-hours, contact my security chief, and he can help you," he added, sending the image of the Envoy. "We're not in competition, here. This has gone international. I didn't realize just how much so until recently, when I was digging into British banks. Oh, if you have any ideas for further areas to investigate, please let us know. I started with British banks, and now I'm trying to get my head around the international consequences. There's some indication that one bank is leading the whole thing, but if so, we haven't found it yet."

"It may not be in Britain," the head of analysis said. "But I think you're the ones that will find it if it exists. OK, we'll stick to America, and pass back anything that goes outside it. You've got the manpower that we don't, though I don't envy you your job. May I ask, how do you handle having two bosses?"

"OH, I don't," Ralph said. "It's more like boss and lieutenant. I'm hired by Muriel – well Home. I've simply been assigned to Taylor. Anything I come up with goes to both of them, and we end up in discussions of where to go next. The whole 'Special Investigator' thing came about when Taylor realized that Muriel needed more authority to actually get in and do some of this investigation. She passed it on to me," he said, pulling out his passport hand handing it to the Envoy. "I started with British banks, because that's what I knew. After the action we took against a private equity in London, I started branching out, and discovered the rest of this. I didn't know until just recently that you were working on the American side of it. And when His Majesty asked me to come over and pass what I had to you, I jumped at the chance. You really can help me by taking this part of the load off me. And, I think I can help you to see where else it leads to, even if it's outside America, some."

"Well, let us work on this," the Envoy said, "and see what we come up with. We'll keep you informed at least once a week on what we've found, unless it's something that looks hot."

I'll get hold of your security chief and make arrangements with him to pass the information to him. If you could do the same . . . ?”

“No problem. I'll make sure he understands that it's a two way street. Even if we do drive on the left,” he quipped. “I'll get out of here and let you get to work. Thanks.” And Ralph translated back to his office.

Chapter 2

Give and Take (Tuesday morning)

“How did it go, Ralph,” asked Taylor. The three of them were, for once, sitting in the King's office for this meeting. Janice was, of course, at her desk, but seemed to be afflicted with selective hearing – much like the Secret Service in Melanie's office.

“I thought it went well. They had no problem with staying focused on the American banks, and feeding back any links that they found that were outside their range,” Ralph replied. “I think they were put off a bit by the uniform, at first. But that soon changed. I fed them the American stuff that I had, first, then gave them the whole thing after that was sorted into place. And they seemed to understand why I was concentrating on Britain and the international connections. Ted only has one squad, so they really can't handle more than just America.”

“You say they were put off by the uniform?” asked Muriel.

“I caught the comment of 'British with a cowboy hat' as a question,” Ralph said, smiling. “It didn't appear to be derogatory. Just surprised.”

“AH! Well, I can fix that. I'll go visiting,” Muriel said, laughing. “I'm sure I can explain it to them. And be outrageous doing it. Then, they'll understand. Did you tell them about the 'Special Investigator' status?”

“Oh, yes. They asked how I handled two bosses, and I told them how it was set up, and how I reported to both of you,” Ralph said.

“Good. I'll reinforce it a bit. In a sense, they're being demoted some,” Muriel said, as way of explanation. “Ted set up his own analysis team to be able to add to what Fred's team does. But your team rather trumps both of them in some ways. You have more people on hand to do the work, so you are able to come up with more information, faster, without pulling on my squads like Fred used to do. However, yours is more focused than Fred's is, too. And really, that's what Ted's team should be. Yes, they can get involved with a mono-focused investigation. But they wouldn't, normally.”

“Oh, I'm sorry,” Ralph said. “I probably should have explained it better to them.”

“Nonsense. They know about differencing uniforms,” Muriel said. “They should have picked up on that. Nope. I'll just blame Taylor for the hat.”

“WHAT! Wait a minute,” Taylor said.

“Nope. Won't. You liked the hat, and we decided to use the blue one and match the tunic to it,” Muriel said. “Simply because he was being tasked to Britain. No problem. You

can always come, too, and show them the blue suit and hat.”

“Hmm. Maybe I'd better, just so I don't end up the fall guy for this,” Taylor said. “If nothing else, it will show that you're not a captive, and that I'm not avoiding America.”

“Sounds good. Ted's probably still asleep, so we shouldn't disturb him by going now,” Muriel said. And she translated them to the street in front of Ted's office doors. Muriel wearing the blue tunic, gray pants and wide brimmed hat. Taylor wearing the blue Edwardian suit and wide brimmed hat. And the puzzled look on Bart's face was priceless.

As they entered, Muriel looked up, pointed to Taylor, and said, “It's his fault,” which got the room chuckling right off the bat. “I understand that you were puzzled over the uniform and hat that Ralph wore. The uniform was to make him look somewhat like a police officer in Britain. We haven't really come up with an international one, yet. And the hat was because it was something that Taylor liked, and we thought it would go well with the tunic.”

“So, THAT'S the reason,” the head of analysis said. “I figured there was a reason. I thought maybe it was because he reported directly to Taylor, and not you.”

“Well, there are times when he does,” Muriel said. “He's actually acting for Home, but is assigned to Taylor right now to try to straighten out the banking mess in Britain. But when the links started going international, he ended up working for both of us. Meaningless really, to say that he works for one or the other, right now. And as for reporting, it's more like discussions, and Taylor and I are both there. I will say, though, that the outfit does make people sit up and take notice.”

“Well, he certainly handed us a load,” the head of analysis said. “We haven't got it all examined, yet. And that's just the American stuff he gave us. But he's certainly been busy. We've got information and evidence that we didn't have before, and it makes for interesting reading. We end up with two or three lawyers in here looking over our shoulder and taking away evidence as we go along. They seem very excited about some of it. When you go back, we'll send a copy of what we have for Ralph and your legal team.”

“I appreciate that,” Muriel said. “If the Enclave legal is in touch with Alice, she may already have it. But I'd be happy to take anything back to them. It might be best to send two disks, if you don't mind.”

“Of course. No problem. Here you go,” he said, and handed them to Muriel. Then Muriel and Taylor waived goodbye, and translated back to Britain.

Ralph was in front of her office when she arrived, with his hand out. Muriel just grinned and handed him a disk. Then he translated back to his office. Muriel continued on inside, and found Alice waiting for her, with her hand out.

“WHAT IS THIS!” Muriel laughed. “Everybody's got their hand out to me. Look, people, I KNOW we pay you enough,” she added, handing her the disk. Alice grinned back, and translated out.

::Muriel, could you come to my office, please,:: Taylor sent.

::On my way,:: she replied, and translated to outside his door. It didn't take any clandestine action to figure out why he wanted her.

"AND I'M TELLING YOU THAT THAT JUST ISN'T THE WAY THINGS ARE DONE," a loud, male voice came through the door. Muriel opened it and walked in, waiving to Janice as she moved toward the casual area.

"Mister Easdale, I think you need to tell me where this demand is coming from," Taylor replied, quietly. "It is the law of the land that this country accepts any certification of a joining of two people from a foreign nation. I have read you the law regarding it. Are you trying to say that you don't know where Home is? You forget yourself. I can see your stripes, so I KNOW that you have made the trip to Home and back under your own power. And I happen to know that your constituents accept the consort-ship of the Leader of Home and I. So, where are you getting this garbage that interferes with our private life?"

::Have him check his balance, Taylor,:: Muriel sent.

"I don't have to tell you where I got the information from. It's very plain that this so-called consort-ship is merely an illegal dodge to keep her from knowing her place," Easdale said.

"Have you checked your balance? It will tell you whether or not you are causing another person or people undue pain," Taylor said.

"THE BALANCE BE DAMNED! This hussy either marries you under the rites of the Anglican church, or she leaves. Now," he replied.

Muriel pulled out her tablet, and ran a search on correspondence to Easdale. ::Anglican church,:: she sent. ::They've been after him to make a stand concerning our consort-ship. I'll have them printed out in a minute.:: And sent the documents to Janice's printer. Moments later, Janice approached Taylor with them, and he took a look.

"Mmm, hmm. Very interesting. I take it that you're rather devout, Easdale. Unfortunate. I recently made it plain that there was a separation between the church and the government. And here you are, breaking that edict. You DO realize that you could be arrested, and lose your seat in Parliament, don't you?" Taylor asked, quietly. "Not only that, but you're here in my office, trying to bully me, rather than raise it in Parliament, which shows that you don't have any support of your fellow members. The answer is no, Easdale, and now, I'll explain why. Should I, as you demand, submit to ANY marriage format that involves a contract between Muriel and I, then Britain would become a subject of Home. NOT the other way around. Further, I have it on good authority that the Anglican church would be disbanded shortly after that. Our joining is not subject to some fictitious person in the sky, Easdale. Nor will I be ruled by the Anglican church OR by you. You are excused. A record of this will be placed before Parliament, with the suggestion that they deal with your absurd demands.

Good day, sir.” Two guards entered and removed the offending member of Parliament.

“I think the next is my turn,” Muriel said.

“What have you got in mind?” asked Taylor.

“Closing down the Anglican church, seizing the records, accounts and property, and having them pay their taxes that way,” Muriel said, with a grim grin on her face. “The Archbishop was warned.”

“I’d be tempted to agree with you,” Taylor said. “But I think that this time I’ll handle it. Believe me, it won’t be gentle. When you gave me the information on Easdale, I asked my analysis section to do a fast scan of the church’s accounts. AND the Archbishop’s. I just told them to freeze them. The church WILL pay it’s taxes, today. And the Archbishop may have to sell some property, and perhaps his fancy car to pay his share. I’m calling the man in.”

And moments later, the rather skinny and pop-eyed man was standing in front of the King. “Well, sir. What do you have to say in your defense?” asked Taylor. “You can’t plead tradition. That was already settled between us at our last meeting. Nor can you plead ignorance of the law. Aside from the fact that ignorance is no excuse, there’s also the fact that the edict was made plain to the public at the time that I told you that your church was expected to pay taxes. By the way, you seem to be somewhat in arrears. Both you and the church. Action will therefore be taken to recover those funds necessary to pay the tax bills and the penalties for late payment.”

The Archbishop looked nervously at Muriel, who smiled back, sweetly and innocently. “Um . . . I really have no idea what you’re talking about, Your Highness.”

“Ah. Here we go again. Sir, I want you to realize that I am NOT Henry the Second. And you are certainly no Thomas Becket. You have failed in your obligation to the government of Britain,” Taylor said. “At this point, I COULD seize all the church property, as well as the personal property of all the clerics, including yourself, and sell them to pay off your debt. Or, I could just have you arrested for tax evasion, and let the court do the same thing with you personally. In either case, it would mean the end of your Primacy, of course. Nor, I think, would there ever be another one. Now . . . I have documents that show that you pestered Easdale to try to do what you were told, point blank WOULD NOT HAPPEN!” And Taylor’s eyes began to glow black.

“You come in here and blatantly call me ‘Your Highness’, despite the fact that you know very well what my title is. And you’ve agitated poor Easdale into trying to force me to be married by the Anglican church. I’m sure that the next step would be to try to force me to be crowned by your archaic rites. And the reason I’m sure is BECAUSE THEY ARE SPELLED OUT IN PLAIN ENGLISH IN THESE DOCUMENTS!” And the red dot appeared in his eyes – the one that appeared to be on the surface, yet very far away.

“You, sir, are guilty of sedition. You have attempted to create an insurrection against the established authority of Britain and the British people. I have given you the opportunity to

come to terms with your new status of simply A church in this country, and not one that has any overt power over the monarchy. You have chosen to ignore that. You would re-enslave the people of Britain to a lie. A LIE, SIR! The majority of the people of this country KNOW the truth – have experienced it for themselves. YOU have not! You CAN not. Not and live.” And then it happened. Taylor grew. He glowed. And then the wings appeared. Muriel quietly moved around behind the man, and assumed the same appearance. “You, sir,” Taylor said, quietly but with a quality of voice that seemed to fill the room, and echo. “You are removed from your position. You will be taken from this room, under arrest, and charges of sedition and tax evasion will be leveled against you. And, with the documentation that I have, you will be tried and found guilty. You will spend the rest of your life in jail, then go to meet your own Judgment and find out the truth – just before the shame of your guilt causes your soul to suicide.”

The Archbishop backed up from the apparition, before him until he came up against Muriel's legs. Then he turned around. And had to look up at the glowing, white figure before him. “Archbishop,” Muriel said, quietly, and without the special effects, more in sorrow than in anger, “you have been willfully naughty. You have irritated one that could have been your friend, despite the differences between you. You have ignored warnings, both this time and the last, that your behavior was out of line. Yet, you insisted on continuing your campaign and even involved an innocent man. You have, in your foolishness, determined that your wishes were law. They aren't.” Muriel was aware of people behind her, and extended her senses and found two guards from the Regiment of Home standing patiently by Janice's desk. “As His Majesty, Taylor, the first of that name, has said, you will be taken from here to be charged, and held for trial. And may you have mercy on your soul.” She and Taylor both collapsed the size, glow and wings at the same time, and she stepped aside from the former Archbishop.

The two guards came forward and placed him under arrest, and removed him from the room by translation. And Muriel looked at Taylor. “I overdid it, didn't I,” he said, making a statement of it.

“Nope. Oh, I WAS a bit worried when your eyes held the red glow inside the black. But you handled yourself well, and you contained the rage,” she said. “I just felt that you needed some backup until the guards could arrive.”

“Heh. Yea. I wasn't thinking at that point,” Taylor said. “But when I went into display, and you echoed it behind him, I suddenly realized that that was not the way to go. Thank you for that. You broke the rage, and let me play it out in outrage, instead. I never really understood what you meant by the difference between them until now. Unfortunately, I think it's going to take some practice for me to recognize when I'm sliding into that, and pull back.”

“There is a saying, 'revenge is a dish best served cold', which basically means that one is better served using a coldly considered response than one taken in the heat of the moment,” Muriel said. “Now, I'm not saying you were taking revenge on him. What I AM saying is that when rage hits, chill it and use it. Use it coldly, and with calculation. THAT'S what you finally did. And if I was the cause of breaking you out of the rage . . . well . . . good. This time. But I won't always be around when you need that.” Then she stopped and thought for a moment.

"Taylor," she finally said, "do you know how sometimes you practice how you're going to present something to others?"

"Yes," he replied, puzzled.

"Use that. Think about a 'rage' type situation, and practice going out of it into the cold, calculating method of using outrage, instead," she said. "Use the anger and rage, but without the actual rage. It's an act, Taylor. Oh, you can be outrageous doing it. I'm not suggesting that you don't. I'm simply suggesting that it be YOU in control, and not the emotion. Your soul can help you with it."

"So, I did do wrong," he said.

Muriel sighed. "Taylor, I stopped trying to make you grow up a while ago. And I would have backed you no matter which way it went," she finally said. "What I'm offering you is another way to handle a situation. One where you ARE in control of yourself and your emotions, because it can be more effective than the rage. No, I'm not judging you. You were well within your rights to simply blast him where he stood. But you DID back off. I'm simply trying to show you how you can be SURE you'll back off in the future, if I'm not standing in front of you to break the rage."

"Oh. Yea. I see. Sorry."

"No reason to apologize. You've still got some of the emotions running through you – still reacting. And I probably should have held the talk until you had calmed down," she said. "Which just goes to show that I'm affected by emotions, too. I was reacting to the situation rather than to you, now. Let it rest. If we need to, we can talk about it later."

"Oh, girl, what would I do without you?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm sure you'd think of something," she replied, grinning, and hugging him. "Now, I probably ought to go back to work." She turned around and looked at Janice. "Thank you for taking the documents over to Taylor. That kept the Easdale focused on Taylor, and helped keep the situation contained."

"You're welcome, Muriel. But it was really nothing," Janice said. And Muriel smiled and waived, then translated to her office.

Chapter 3

The Speech

(Wednesday morning, a week later)

The day had come for the opening of Parliament, and Taylor broke with tradition right off the bat. There was no grand procession of him through the streets, nor into the House of Lords where his speech would be given. Instead, he was there, waiting for them, standing in front of the throne. Standing ten feet tall, glowing, and with wings furled at his back. He wore his formal white uniform, and the crown, and he stood at an attitude of parade rest and looked like a statue. Some few older members had to be attended by Envoy trained doctors at the sight of him when they realized that he was breathing.

“My Lords and Members of the House of Commons . . .,” he said when they had quieted. “This will be a somewhat different speech from the throne than you are used to,” and his wings unfurled, flexed a couple of times, then furled again. “We have been through some trying times, recently, and need time to recover. We do not need dissension between parties, nor attempts to wrest control for one cause or another. What we need is calm, intelligent discussion. I know that this is not what you are used to, whether from direct knowledge or from what you've seen on the telly. There will be strict order in each of the Houses, or I will take such action as I deem appropriate to see that order is restored.”

“It has come to my attention that various factions and external sources have tried to influence you prior to your taking office. I will tell you this once. You will ignore them. You are here to serve the people of Britain, NOT some faction or external organization. Should I find that you are being so influenced, the arrests will begin and the least of the charges will be for subversive activities. Needless to say the highest of the charges will be treason.”

“Recently, I had a visitor to my office demanding that I either marry my consort by the rites of the Anglican church or put her aside. I note that that visitor is not present, today, and that he has resigned his seat. I also note that the Archbishop who had influenced that visitor and Member of Parliament, is in jail on charges of subversive activities and tax evasion. So that you know, this was the second time that he'd tried to gain control of the throne by using religious blackmail. He was warned, then, that such behavior was not appropriate. You will note that there was no second warning. Like him, you have each received your only warning. As long as you are behaving in a civilized manner and doing your job of finding ways to help the whole population of Britain, there will be no problem. Attempt to sway me toward one business or another, or toward a religion or any other special interest group, and you will find yourself in a cell very close to that failed cleric. Do not make the mistake of falling into the trap for which previous Parliament was arrested.”

“You do have one recourse. If you feel that I am not doing the job I should be, then have the people of Britain decide. You may call a vote any time you wish, and the people can decide whether or not I will continue to be King. Of course, there is always the possibility that the vote will fail to go your way. In which case, there will be new elections for your seats, or requests for more honest nobles to assist in the government. You will not have a second

chance to try to remove me. A call for a vote to remove me as monarch is a call for a vote of confidence in your ability to make just laws. One or the other of us will fail. Should it be me, then I will immediately remove myself from the throne, and renounce all lands, titles, and citizenship in this country. And yes, I feel that strongly that I am right. PROVE me wrong, ladies and gentlemen, and I will leave quietly. And, if you are wrong, I would expect you to do the same."

"Therefore, your first task is to go back to the 'special interest groups' and advise them that they are NOT the government, nor do they have any say in the government. They may try giving you gifts, or money, or even blackmail. Should that happen, come to me. We will work out the problem, and the 'special interest group' will find themselves no longer in business. Such 'special interest groups' may try to argue that it's traditional, or it's the way it's always been. We are not here to do things the way they have always been done. We are here to do what NEEDS to be done. We do not need to provide a guaranteed income to the rich. We do not need to lend our authority to those that would gain power over people and strip them of their rights. We do not need their Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt. Therefore, we will avoid it, and do the best we can to help the people that actually do the work."

"In the coming days, I will be interviewing some of you with a view to creating my cabinet. Some members already exist, but I would have others from the House of Lords and House of Commons join in, that the voices of those chambers may better be heard. In the mean time, there are issues that need to be addressed that will be laid before you. My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, I will expect that you will think rationally and take responsibility for your actions as we take our counsels."

At that point, the wings disappeared, the glow disappeared, and he resumed his normal height, and left the dais by translating to his office. Muriel and Janice were waiting for him, and provided him with the only applause that he expected from such a speech. He gave an ironic smile, and went to his recliner, by his mate.

" 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant', " Muriel quoted. She left out the remainder of the quote – 'thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many' – from the New Testament. The obvious allusion was to the fact that he'd been Colonel in Chief of the Regiment, and was now King. That turned his ironic smile into a grimace. Then, he laughed at his reaction, and acknowledged the jest.

"You made a difference in your final statement to them, didn't you?" Janice asked.

"Yep. The old way asked for the blessings of god. You see how well THAT worked. So, instead, I asked them to be rational and take responsibility for their actions. There is no excuse for the way the previous Parliament behaved. I will be repeating the warnings in the speech at every opening of Parliament that I serve," Taylor said. "The sad part is that I will probably have to enforce it a few times before people realize that those aren't just pretty words."

"Easdale wasn't there," Muriel said.

"Nope. He resigned, later that afternoon. He realized that he'd blown it. They're holding a special election for his seat," Taylor said. "And nobody's showing up, so far."

"I'd better get back to my desk. There's bound to be people wanting to talk to you about that speech," Janice said.

"NOT the media," Taylor said. "They were given a copy of it just before I read it. They were also given the specific points along the way, and what they meant. So, any questions they have would simply to try to twist my words around to something they like. NOT going to happen."

"You can always hide out in my office," Muriel said.

"Nope. If any of Parliament decides to skip the initial meeting and come see me, I should be here," Taylor said. "Besides, there are things I need to go over. I'll be calling dad in, later. He's on my cabinet."

"How?"

"Oh, he was elected by the district he's in. He was there, today. I could feel him," Taylor said. "Normally, the cabinet is chosen by the Prime Minister. But this time I made a few selections of my own, with a view to the possibilities of who would BE Prime Minister. That's the first thing that Parliament needs to do, now, is choose a Prime Minister. Then he'll select the rest of the 'government'."

"Well, if you're going to be busy, then perhaps I should get out of here," Muriel said.

"Oh, it'll take them a while to sort out who the Prime Minister and cabinet will be," Taylor said. "I think we have time to go over a few things, first."

"That sounds ominous," Muriel replied.

"Heh. No, nothing like that," Taylor grinned. "Banks. The information that Ted's analysis section sent back had Ralph's troops going gaga. And legal was just as impressed. They filled in other connections that Ralph hadn't found, yet, and provided the evidence for them. Melanie contacted me, too. They're ready to roll up the banks in America, and wanted to know if we wanted to make it a joint effort by dealing with the branches, here, at the same time. What she has in mind is taking dual action against the 'home office' of each of them. In other words, each of us charging the officers under our individual laws. It's a way around the problem of dealing with multi-nationals. Since there's no world government that can deal with them, simply get together and deal with it individually. One good thing that comes out of it is that the perpetrators will end up spending the rest of their lives in jail, and the banks would be nationalized."

"OUCH! Yea, I can see where that would put positive controls in place, immediately," Muriel said.

"Your banks are clear of it. Oh," he went on, "there's some peripheral activity through your banks. Cash movements and such. But you've been scrupulous in stopping movements where you discovered there was nefarious activity going on. And it's nothing that your banks are knowingly involved in. Either the ones, here . . . now . . . or the ones in America that you took over a while back. In fact, from what I've seen of the American record, you've been scrupulous in notifying government authorities of such activities and freezing accounts when they requested. That's how America came up with some of the links. They knew what people or organizations were trying to move money into illegal activities, even though they were no longer moving it through your banks. With those names, Ralph apparently went through the British banks and found where they were doing the same thing, and doing it knowingly. And America did the same with Ralph's information. It's resulted in the construction of a tight little web of deceit between the banks, which opened up an even wider investigation, and it's possible that the terrorists and drug and human traffickers in other countries could be rolled up. That's what Melanie wants to do, if possible. A joint action between ALL the countries that have an Enclave."

"Oh, my. She doesn't want much from us, does she. I'm surprised she didn't come to me, directly," Muriel said.

"She didn't feel she was quite ready, yet. She's still playing the political scene, trying to get the authorizations from the governments," Taylor said.

"Hmm. OK, I can see that. And she's right. It's better off coming from the government of a country than from us," Muriel said. "But it still would take us time to come up to speed on that massive a maneuver. Unless the countries were to take the action, alone. You know? I think I need to talk to her about that. That may be what she's planning. Would it bother you if I did a little visiting without you?"

"Nope. And I saw the same thing you did," Taylor said. "It's why I gave you this little briefing. You might want to get with Ralph and see what he and legal have come up with, first."

"I'll do that. And I'll see when Melanie is free to talk. It would be nice to roll up some of these terrorist organizations," Muriel said. "I'd put Envoys in stealth at points where they're going to hit, except that we never know. That's all done on the local level, from what I can see. And it's radicals trying to get the governments of some of the middle Eastern countries to swing their way out of fear."

"Well, they aren't the only group that's a problem. We have our own, in Ireland," Taylor said. "They've been quiet for a while, but I'm expecting a flareup, soon."

"Reasons?"

"Nope. Feelings. They've had a chance to see me in action on a couple of occasions, where we got word of the possibility of strikes," Taylor said. "That was back when I was running the Regiment. It tends to put them off their feed to show up and find a company of Regiment troops surrounding them, encasing them in shields and arresting them." Muriel

chuckled.

“So, you think they're laying back, trying to see if the Regiment has any weaknesses it can exploit under a new commander?” she asked.

“Well, that, and they want to see how I'm going to behave as King,” he replied. “Some of the funds transfers are going to radical Irish groups. You've had no problem getting the Scots on board with training, after they overcame their initial conservative attitudes. But the Irish are a different problem. They have had so much violence over the years that they are leery of any strangers coming into an area. And mounted troops will clear the streets just by showing up. Even if they don't do anything.”

“Hmm. I'll think about that one. I haven't visited Ireland. Either one of them. Perhaps it's time I did,” Muriel said. “Come to think of it, don't you need to go North, sometime, and address the Scots Parliament? I could always take a side trip, then.”

“Yes. Well, it's not a trip I'm looking forward to. I've never really understood the Scots. But I'd at least like to appear friendly toward them. It'll be awhile, though. You COULD talk with the First Minister of Wales, though, and see what's holding up the training there,” Taylor said. “I'd advise getting the language from Betty before you try, though.”

“Hmm. Yes. Written as well as spoken,” Muriel said. “And I'll see about setting up an appointment. We don't have an Enclave in either Wales or Scotland, do we,” she made it a statement.

“Nope. We always simply worked out of the one, here. Oh,” Taylor said, as he suddenly made a realization of what she was saying. “Oh, my. You're saying that by having a Home presence in their countries they might be more amenable to working with us. Yes, that might make a difference in BOTH countries. Scotland already has trained people. But Wales doesn't. Or they have so few that they don't make any impact. How would you approach them, though?”

“Same way Ted did with America. Present my credentials as an Ambassador. Then talk,” Muriel said. “And you KNOW I'm good at talking.”

“Um . . . yes,” Taylor said. And Muriel hit him.

“Goof! Are you trying to say that I talk too much?” she asked.

“NO! No. I'd never say something like that,” he replied, laughing. “I wouldn't dare.” And she hit him again.

“Seriously, dear, you'll want the Welsh language. They DO use it,” Taylor said. “And it's not something that you're going to learn by simply listening to it. And reading it is worse. But Betty can set you straight, so you can handle anything. I tried talking to them, shortly after I got the Regiment firmly established, but I think my age put them off. That or the fact that I was a royal. I was really sorry that I flubbed it. They're a beautiful people to be around,

and their history and music are astounding. See if you can get an appointment with the First Minister, and see what happens from there. It could be that he'll be more amenable to talking to an attractive young lady than he was with a brash young adult male."

"I'll do that, then. Let me get with Mata and see what I can get set up," she said, and translated back to her office.

Mata just grinned at her as she translated in, and Betty was right there beside her. "Oh, girl, THIS is going to HURT!" Betty said, laughing. "You may not talk straight for a week."

"Oh, oh. What have I gotten myself into?" Muriel asked.

"Oh, nothing much. Just possibly the most confusing language you've ever seen," Betty said. "They use consonants like they were fully automatic assault weapons. They splatter them everywhere. There actually IS some logic to it, though."

"Well, might as well load me up, then, and I'll see how bad it is. I'd like to set up the appointment for as soon as possible. Oh, Mata," Muriel said to her security chief, "it'll be squad one when I go. And you, of course."

"You think you'll be able to get an appointment that fast?" asked Mata.

"Maybe. It depends on how curious I can make him. Or her," Muriel said. "Which is it?"

"A him," Mata said. "William Gruffydd."

"Ah. OK. Betty, you might as well start, then, and I'll see how tongue tied I can get," Muriel said.

"Start! Girl, I finished a LONG time ago. Try to keep up," Betty said. And Muriel stuck her tongue out at her.

Chapter 4

Welshing on a Deal

(Wednesday afternoon)

"First Minister's office. May I help you?" a pleasant young woman said.

"AH! Yes. My name is Muriel White. I was wondering if I could make an appointment with the First Minister to present my credentials," Muriel said. And Mata snickered.

"I'm sorry, Miss White. I'm not sure I understand. Why would you need to present your credentials to him?" the woman asked.

"Oh, dear. I'm SO out of practice at this. I should have said. I'm an Ambassador from Home," Muriel said.

"Wouldn't that be better done with His Majesty?" asked the young lady.

"Oh, Taylor," Muriel said, tossing off the familiarity. "He's such a dear. But he felt that it would be better if I presented myself and my credentials to the Government of Wales to be courteous. No sense having Britain hogging all the fun, is there?"

"Um Just a moment please," and Muriel was put on hold for about a minute. Then a male voice came on the line.

"Miss White. You've managed to intrigue me. I'm William Gruffydd, First Minister of the Assembly," he said.

"Why, thank you, First Minister. I wanted to visit your country, and see if perhaps there were things that Home makes that would benefit you and your people. Minor trade agreement and such," Muriel said. "And, of course, it would only be polite to do things properly, now, wouldn't it?"

"Well, I do have some time available. But I'm afraid that you'd never be able to get here in time to take advantage of it," Gruffydd said.

"Oh, nonsense. I can be there in minutes. After all, I'm only just around the corner," Muriel said. "Oh, I'd be bringing my security chief and a squad. But, of course, they're not armed or anything."

"Just around . . . where exactly ARE you, Miss White?" Gruffydd asked.

"Oh, Buckingham Palace. But that's such a short distance, after all," Muriel said. "So, if you don't mind my disturbing you, we can be in your outer office in about a minute."

"Miss . . . is this some sort of prank call?" asked Gruffydd.

“Oh, not at all. Just a moment please,” Muriel said. Then, without taking her phone away from her face, said, “Mata, do you have the image of the outer office?”

“Yes, Ambassador,” Mata replied, grinning.

“Oh, very good. Mister Gruffydd, if you'd go to your outer office, I'll prove that this isn't a prank call,” Muriel said.

“Very well, just a minute,” he grumped. And a moment later, “Well, I'm here.”

“And so am I,” Muriel said, smiling as she translated in, wearing her 'fighting formals'.

“MY WORD! How?” he asked.

“Oh, our methods of transportation are a bit more advanced than those used in many parts of this world,” Muriel said. “Oh, yes. I'm forgetting myself. My security chief, Mata, and Squad One. As you can see, all without any weapons. My security chief insists that I take at least one squad on formal occasions. Not that I need them for protection, you understand. But they are such dears.”

“Why do I have the feeling that I'm being scammed?” asked Gruffydd. “Exactly WHO are you?” And Muriel handed him her Home passport. THAT raised his eyebrows. Then he looked inside and read the certificate declaring her an Ambassador from Home to the people of earth.

“You might want to turn the page, sir,” Muriel said, pleasantly.

“Oh?” he asked, then he did. “Oh. Oh my. THE Leader of Home. I'm beginning to understand why you underplayed it so much. I don't think I'd have had the courage to see you, had I known. And now I can understand why you can use His Majesty's name with such familiarity and call him a dear. I think you'd better come into my office, and tell me what this is actually all about.”

“No problem. The squad can stay out here, so you won't feel intimidated,” Muriel said.

“Trust me, I'm intimidated,” Gruffydd said. “Oh, this is Miss Edwards, my secretary,” he added as they went by her desk.

“Pleased to meet you, Miss Edwards. I'm Muriel,” Muriel said.

“And that tells me why you used your last name,” Gruffydd said. “Threw me off, it did. You're human, aren't you? And American?”

“Yes, on both counts. My security chief and squads are all Envoys – the People of Home,” Muriel said. “And it was by THEIR choice that I became the Leader. No politicking, no voting, and I didn't even know when it happened. Just a consensus that they were all

following in the direction I was going.”

“Amazing. May I ask, how long have you been Leader?” he asked, as he motioned her to a seat.

“Nine years, now,” Muriel said. “I took over from the previous Leader. HE knew that I'd been selected, and knew why, and wasn't upset. In fact, by that time even he was following me. He's still an Ambassador. In fact, he's the Ambassador to America. Much like what happened with Taylor when he was selected to be King. We downgraded him from Ambassador to Britain. Now, he's just a liaison Ambassador to Home and the British government and people.”

“Nine years. No term limits, then, I take it?” he asked.

“Nope. But I could be demoted at any time, simply because the Envoys felt that somebody else was better serving their needs and interests,” Muriel replied.

“And you're all right with that?” he asked.

“Yep. I'd still be an Ambassador of some sort, and still have my squads. Probably still have the actual work I do, too,” she said. “And the biggest part of that job is to find ways to help people.”

“Why?” he asked.

“Why do I want to help people? Or why do they?” Muriel asked.

“Both,” he said.

“Well, me, personally, because I've seen what it's like to be poor – to struggle for a living and be afflicted with disease that's debilitating and terminal. My parents, not me,” Muriel added. “And there ARE ways to help people like that. And the Envoys do it because humans were meant to have the training that they are and they offer.”

“At the risk of sounding like a young child, why?” asked Gruffydd.

“Because Envoys created humans, and the training was supposed to open up in them as the children grew up. They made a mistake, and it didn't happen,” Muriel said. “I can see the next question, so I'll answer it. Home is a universe in another dimension. There are similarities, and differences. But the differences are minor, compared to the similarities. They had stagnated, and created humans – us – to try to figure out how they could advance. Then they ran into a spot of trouble that caused them to no longer be in control of their experiment. And humans became wild, and developed their own societies and cultures. Now, it's no longer an experiment. They want humans to have what they were always supposed to have – the Envoy techniques that allow us to do phenomenal things. And that's the biggest thing I offer. And it's free. We have other things to offer, and they do cost, but the cost is much less than similar items created by humans, currently, without the training.”

"You say your security chief and squads are Envoys. Yet they look human," Gruffydd said. "And you talk as if they WERE different. What are they?"

"Energy. Intelligent energy. Well, actually, you have legends of them, from times when they HAVE been seen on earth. It's just that it hasn't been for a long time. If you like, I'll call Mata, and she can show you," Muriel said.

"Would she mind?" asked Gruffydd.

"Not really. She's done it before. Even voluntarily and unasked. Mata," Muriel said and sent, "would you come here, please?"

"Sure, Muriel. What's up?" asked Mata, translating in.

"Mister Gruffydd wanted to know what you were. I suggested that there were legends of Envoys from the few times that you did appear on earth," Muriel said. "And yes, I'll clean up after you. And no, I won't try to say that you're a little down."

Mata laughed, then turned and faced the First Minister. And suddenly there were wings. Hundreds of wings. "Now, that's just showing off! ONE set would have been enough," Muriel said.

"Ah, well, I can do that, too," she said, and suddenly there was only Mata and one set of wings.

"GOOD LORD! You're a"

"Yep. We don't use the 'A' word any more. But that's what we are. Messengers," Mata said. "But we're both the messenger and the message. Oh, and protectors and nurturers, too. Really, though, this isn't impressive anymore. Anybody can do it," she added, flexing the wings, then furling them.

"That's . . . they're real?" he asked.

"Oh, yea. Well, more real when Muriel does them. But that's because she has a physical body that . . . oops."

"NOW you did it. I didn't even have a chance to ask him if he WANTED to be trained. Well," Muriel said, "this one's on you. I'm not taking the hit for it. We're going to need Brad in here in a few minutes. There's NO WAY I'm going to try to teach him clothing."

"Brad can do it. He's been studying with the clothier in the American Enclave. AND with Carla. Just in case you wanted something and Carla wasn't available. A little conservative, but not bad," Mata said. "OK, here he comes."

"Mister Gruffydd? Are you all right? I apologize. That wasn't supposed to happen.

Mata just said the wrong thing at the wrong time, and it triggered the connection,” Muriel said.

“Oh Wow Suddenly, the world is different,” Gruffydd said in a subdued voice. “What just happened?”

“My fault,” Mata said. “I made a mistake when I told you about Muriel being able to produce wings. I said that it was because she had a body that hers were more real. It triggered you, and you connected to your soul. So, now you know what humans are. Envoys created humans to try to gain the ability to be creative. So they created the bodies, and placed Envoys, which are just soul, into them. Well, the bodies aren't created, anymore. But the Envoys still place the souls into them. Not something I was involved in, so I can't tell you how, or at what point.”

“So, you're just a soul?” he asked.

“Um, hum,” Mata replied.

“And she works for you?” he asked, pointing at Muriel.

“Nope. Other way around. We work for her. She has creativity, and MUCH more experience than Envoys do. In fact, at twelve she had more of both. We just didn't realize it until we started training her, and she ended up training us,” Mata said. “She thinks, and applies that thinking in ways that we'd never have thought of to use it.”

“Sir,” Muriel said, “we need to finish it. You've got the basics, from the standpoint of an Envoy. But there's been changes and improvements since then. Is there any chance that you can take the rest of the afternoon off?”

“Yea,” Gruffydd said. “I told you I had a little time mostly because I didn't know that you could get here so quickly. Or that you were who you said you were. Woof! Were you EVER who you said you were. And more. Ma'am, you're good.”

“Well, before you say another word, I'm twenty one. And I was twelve when I started,” Muriel said. “So, I've had some experience in talking with people that might be skittish, or not understand my youth.”

“Yea. I guess you would have,” he said. “I'll have to let my secretary know that I'll be out. Oh, and I think the Assembly should meet, tomorrow. Special plenary, for you to submit your credentials. Will I be able to be back for that?”

“Of course. The upgrade to your training only takes a couple of hours. Anna in Russia did it in less time, even allowing for interruptions. And she was only eleven at the time,” Muriel said, grinning.

“Right. Challenge me with an eleven year old that doesn't have all the questions I have,” Gruffydd said. “So, what's she do, now?”

"Ambassador to Russia from Home. And makes the President sit up and take notice when she speaks," Muriel laughed.

"Oh, my. OK, I'm game. How do we do this?" he asked.

"Simple. You talk to your secretary, and assure her that you're not being abducted," Muriel said. "Then we translate you to my office and I let one of my squad finish training you. Or maybe to 'The Welcoming One' would be better. Well, we'll see when we get you to London."

"Oh, I never thought to ask, and your mentioning 'The Welcoming One' reminded me," he said. "That building. It looks like a woman with wings. Was that your security chief?"

"Yes, Muriel, I'll clean up after you. And no, I won't suggest that you were a little down," Mata echoed Muriel's earlier statement, laughing. And Muriel grinned and moved to the center of the room, and went into full display. Then added enough glow to become indistinct.

"A friend of mine is an architect, engineer, interior decorator and clothing designer. We just call her a designing woman," Muriel said, as she resumed her normal appearance. "She actually used a number of images in the design of the building."

"Uh, huh. I've heard there's a statue inside like that," he said.

"Yea. I did the statue after seeing the building and being hinted at by my friend that she wanted an image behind the reception desk that better showed what she was trying to do. It took me nine images, all taken at once, and an hour and a half to do it," Muriel said.

"Uh, huh. Let me talk to Miss Edwards, then we can go," he said.

Chapter 5

Dealing with the Welsh

(Thursday morning)

“Ladies and gentlemen of the Assembly, I asked you to come to this unprecedented meeting of the full Assembly for a reason. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to meet and speak with an Ambassador that would like to formally present her credentials to you. This is something of a courtesy, since she's already presented them to His Majesty, King Taylor. This should only take a few minutes of your time, unless you have questions you'd like to ask her. Madam Ambassador?”

A bell sounded, directly opposite the First Minister's seat, and Muriel appeared over the heads of the members, accompanied by a short, startled, loud squeak from the public gallery. Muriel, in full 'fighting formals', quietly walked down the aisle to just in front of the First Minister's desk, and greeted him, then turned to the rest of the encircling assembly.

“Ladies and gentlemen, My name is Muriel. I'm the Leader of Home and Ambassador to the people of Earth. And I thank you for letting me present my credentials, formally, to this Assembly. I will try to be brief, so you can get back to your normal jobs and lives.”

“The place known as Home is another universe in another dimension. Those with training are able to go there at any time, and meet people. I know. I was the first living human to make the trip under her own power, and return alive. And I was able to do that because I'd been trained in how to reach it by one of the people of Home, an Envoy. Before I took that trip, I had some other training that gave me the ability to make that entrance that so startled someone in the gallery.” She looked up at the windows and said, “Sorry. I didn't mean to upset you,” and smiled.

“Home would like to offer you and your people that training. The skills don't take long to learn, and don't cost anything. Humans were meant to have these skills, and the Envoys have been beating themselves up over the fact that they weren't able to teach humans until recently – well, from their point of view – due to circumstances beyond their control. In addition to that free training, there are also things that have been developed over the last nine years that may benefit you and your people, and they are also free.”

“Now, there are no 'gotchas' involved with that. Yes, we do have things that we sell or do for money. Computers, phones, cars, computer programs – those, by the way, were all originally designed by a friend of mine. And yes, he's human. Another friend designs and oversees the construction of buildings, does interior decorating, and clothing design, and styles herself as a designing woman.” This brought chuckles from the crowd.

“Another friend of mine was instrumental in getting medicine revamped using Envoy techniques to heal people. Still another developed methods to rescue people, even from heavily armed hostage situations without any shots fired or anyone harmed once her action takes place. And, she and her team all have the ability to heal people from wounds.”

“Now, the products and services, with the exception of Rescue and Recovery, DO have a cost. But that cost is a fraction of what you would pay for similarly labeled products or services produced by humans using what you would refer to as conventional procedures. The education to do these things, yourself, is free to any trained person.”

“There is a great deal that we do that we don't charge for, simply because Home is not a cash-based civilization. The only reason we, on earth, charge something for some things is because that provides us with the means to help those that are no longer able to help themselves. The poor. The victims of the downturn of the economy of earth due to unscrupulous people in business and finance. The sick. The elderly. Much of my own salary that I get for being an Ambassador go to things like this. So do the salaries of my original twelve friends, and a number of other Ambassadors all over the world. With the basic training, you don't NEED a lot of money.”

“Well, there are a lot of other things we do, or can do. And I'd be happy to talk with any of you that would like to know more. Simply contact me or my Security Chief,” she said, and cards appeared on the desks of the members of the Assembly, “and we'll see that you get to my office to discuss them. Or, in groups over ten, there is a building in London that has plenty of room for all of you at once. And yes, you can ask about the training, too. Now, let me be officious for a moment and make the presentation of my credentials, formally.” And from a 'no pocket' she drew two parchments sealed with the Home logo. The first was her certificate as Leader of Home, and the second was the one declaring her an Ambassador. She held these up, showing the members of the Assembly by slowly turning from right to left, then faced the First Minister's desk and presented them to him.

“Thank you, Muriel, both for the courtesy of presenting your credentials to us, and for the demonstration and talk about who and what you are,” Gruffydd said, and shook hands with her. Muriel turned around and faced back the way she'd come in.

Yes, I'm going to do it again, she sent, audibly, to the young lady that had squeaked. **I'll walk up the air, then ring a bell and disappear when I'm about three feet from the glass. Why don't you meet me outside.** And proceeded to do just that, smiling at the girl as she did so. :: Mata?::

::Tracking. Going to go civies, now?:: Mata asked in return.

::Yep. She deserves to be apologized to, personally. I didn't realize there'd be anyone in the gallery, since this isn't a normal Plenary session, and was called on the spur of the moment,:: Muriel sent back. Now in a pantsuit that looked something like a formally styled pair of farmer's coveralls, she stood near the entrance to the building.

::She's on her way. Part of a group. Students, from what I can see. College age, I think. Too old to be high school.::

::Thanks, Mata. OH! I see them,:: Muriel sent, then broke off. “Excuse me. I believe one of you deserves an apology. Hi,” Muriel said, homing in on the girl. “My name is Muriel.

And I'm sorry that I startled you. I didn't realize that anyone would be in the gallery, since this wasn't a normal session. My fault. I should have checked, and warned you."

"We're from the college," an older woman said. "We had a concert, yesterday, and thought to visit, here, when we found out that there was to be a special session."

"Well, I'm glad you got an opportunity. And I really am sorry that I startled you. Will you forgive me?" asked Muriel of the girl.

"Yes. Of course. Can I ask, why is it so important that I forgive you?" the girl asked.

"Tamara, don't be impertinent!" the woman said.

"Tamara. Is that your name?" At the girl's nod, Muriel went on, "It's important to me because when I go back to Home I go through the Judgment all over again. Anything that isn't resolved hits me. So far, I've managed to keep myself pretty clear, so that the Judgment doesn't bother me. It's something that every human goes through, every time they go to Home. And, since I have friends there, I end up going through it maybe a dozen times a year."

"Muriel? You're still here?" asked the First Minister.

"Yes, I wanted to apologize to this young lady for startling her," Muriel said. "So, what college are you from?" she asked Tamara.

"Cardiff University. We're in the choir there, and the director thought we might like to see how a professional choir sounds and looks, and get a chance to meet them," Tamara said. "We had to book ahead, quite a bit, to do it, but it was worth it. And my parents didn't complain TOO much about the cost." Which brought chuckles from the other students, and an indulgent smile from their director.

"Well. I think I'll have to attend one of your performances, sometime. And perhaps Taylor would like to see it, too. Break him away from that stodgy old rock and roll that he seems to like," Muriel said, which caused outright laughter from the students. "Ma'am, if you have a card or something so I can contact you . . . ?"

"Oh, nothing on me, unfortunately. But I can give you the information," the woman said.

"That'll work," Muriel said, pulling her tablet out of a 'no pocket', and there were gasps from the group. "Relax, people. It's just one of the techniques. And this way, the only thing I can lose is my way. And I have people for that." Whereupon Mata translated in beside her. "See what I mean?" And the kids laughed. Muriel got the information from the woman, and put the tablet away.

"Can anyone learn to do that?" asked one of the kids.

"Pretty much. People that are bullies of one form or another can't, because they can't take the training. But I've trained people from all over the world. Some of them important people. And this is baby stuff for them. Why? Would you like to find out more?" And you could almost hear Muriel say 'hint, hint'.

"Yea, I would!" the boy said, and Muriel handed him a card.

"Anyone else? You contact my office, and we'll come get you. We'll talk with you. We'll even provide lunch or whatever. Oh, if you DO take the training and it takes longer than just a few hours, then we provide rooms, clothing, food, entertainment, medical if necessary. It's all free," Muriel said, handing out cards to others that wanted them, including the director. "Any other questions?"

"Yes," said a young lady, "You were wearing a uniform in there. But now you're wearing a pantsuit. How?"

"Oh, like this," Muriel said, and cycled through a number of changes. "Part of the basic training."

"Why the Judgment? Do the Envoys only want good people there?" asked a boy.

"Nope. Has nothing to do with that," Muriel said. "EVERY human goes through it when they go to home. Some of us go voluntarily and under our own power. The Judgment is actually part of you, not something that's done from outside. Simply landing on Judgment Square triggers it, and everything that you've done comes pouring out. No excuses, no rationalization. Just did it cause physical or mental harm to someone, and did you try make restitution for it. Some things you CAN'T make restitution for. For those of us that go there voluntarily, it gives us a chance to see what repairs we need to make, so that the next time it won't be as bad."

"You keep saying 'voluntarily'. Why," the boy insisted.

"Everybody dies. And when they do, they go to Home," Muriel said. "I know. I was twelve the first time I went, and met a friend of mine, there. She'd died the year before in a traffic accident."

"Oh. OH! You mean . . . oh, my gosh. Then the Envoys . . . ?" he asked.

"Your turn, Muriel. And I'll keep my mouth shut this time," Mata said, grinning.

"OK, give me a little room. Now, mind you, I'm human. But this is one of the techniques that Envoys have and can teach." And she grew, then grew her wings. "And yes, they're real. And if Mata picks up a feather and asks me if I'm a little down, I'll hit her."

"A little down . . . oh. Oh, brother. WHO thought that one up?" asked the boy, as Muriel resumed her normal appearance.

"Well . . . actually . . . I was only twelve, all right? It's a kid thing. And what do kids do?" Muriel asked.

And from the air came twelve voices. "KIDS KID!" And the group cracked up.

"Wait a minute," Muriel said, turning to Mata, "that was a recording!"

"Of course. Can't let a good pun go to waste. Especially on a new audience," Mata said, smugly.

"GRR! Security chiefs. Can't live with them, can shoot them because the bullets bounce off," Muriel said in mock anger.

"Yea, but with you, it's bombs, missiles, RPGs, bullets, knives, gas, well, just about everything including rain when you don't have an umbrella," Mata replied.

"You're kidding," one of the kids said.

"Nope. She's been through it all. A lot of it when she was twelve. She taught us a better way to build a shield, taught the air force how to fly . . ."

"Now, wait a minute. The air force HAD to have known how to fly, already," the kid said.

"Without planes," Mata replied.

"Oh. Wait, WHAT? That's not possible," he said.

"Remember how I entered the room?" asked Muriel, and promptly lifted above the group, turned and flew toward the glass walls at the front of the building, then turned back and walked her way down to where she'd been standing. "Remember that last bit? Well, all of it is flying. And there's a game my friends came up with that has people flying a hundred and fifty miles per hour – I'll let you convert that to kilometers per hour – and pushing a ball toward a goal. It gets hectic and fast. Come out and I'll show you how twelve year old kids used to relax."

"People can actually do that?" he asked.

"Well, I'm a people, and I can do it. I've got twelve friends that could do it at twelve, and showed it to an Air Force General, that then taught ENLISTED men to do it, so that when he taught officers and they were reluctant because they thought it was beneath them, he could just point to the enlisted men," Muriel said. "And there's a bunch more that you can do. We've got records of stuff that we've done that would curl your hair. Thirteen kids pancaked planes in the desert in Arizona because they crossed the no fly zone above the American Enclave, and were going to fire missiles at my office. We've shut down businesses by outdoing the trick the FBI uses in hostage situations. Then seven friends of mine improved on that by bettering themselves, physically, to be able to pass the physical requirements of

various organizations, including the US Navy Seals, learned techniques used by Envoy trained people in the FBI, Secret Service, Seals and Coast Guard, and became the Rescue and Recovery unit of Home. Oh, and one of THEM is a professional philosopher.”

“GEEZ! What DON'T you people do?” he asked.

“We don't give up on people. There's a lieutenant that's commanding a Metropolitan Police station in what used to be one of the worst neighborhoods of London. A few weeks ago, he was a paraplegic. My friend the doctor went in and took a look, and talked with the Envoy that had trained HER – at twelve – and they restored his back and nerves, and got him past the hump of building himself back up. His first duty as a lieutenant?” Muriel said. “He took a walk. Was accosted by ten rowdy teenagers that were going to beat him up. He leveled them by using the leader like a bowling ball, and flattened them. NOW, half of them are working for him, directly. The other half are going around fixing up flats for people, helping them get groceries, and doing other things that a lot of people don't think about for the poor and elderly. You want to join in with people that don't give up? Come talk to me,” she concluded, grinning. And Gruffydd just looked at her and shook his head.

Chapter 6

Core Group
(Friday morning)

Muriel translated to her office, still yawning. “SHEESH! Why am I so tired?” Mata looked at her and grinned. “Nope. Not that,” she said. “And not that, either. I'd know if I were pregnant. Maybe the weather is changing.”

“Yea. Right. It's ALWAYS changing over here. You don't like it? Wait a minute, it'll change,” Mata said. “People in Britain carry umbrellas when the sun is shining, because they know that sooner or later they'll need them.”

“And why is it so dark in here?” Muriel asked, then looked outside the window. “There's an awning out there.”

“Astute observation. And what's under the awning?” asked Mata.

“People. Kids! College age kids!” Muriel said.

“We've been shuttling them in since seven this morning,” Mata said. “It's about to be a busy day. But that's all right. You need it.”

“So, why store them outside like cord wood instead of taking them to 'The Welcoming One'?”

“Because I wasn't sure where you wanted to train them. There's only ten out there,” Mata said. “We handled more than that when you first came to Enclave.”

“Hmm. Point made,” Muriel said. “OK, we'll train here.”

“Oh, in bringing them in, your squad members checked to be sure that they would be trainable. They are,” Mata said. “So, you can do it the fast way. Break room?”

“Yea. I want an Envoy by each of them. Gender specific,” Muriel said. “DANG! We need a doctor to make sure they're all healthy, too.”

“Aretha's on her way. She has a patient with a broken leg. Should only be another couple of minutes,” Mata replied. “Oh, the system is working, too. Swipe the card, tell the reader the diagnosis, fix the patient, swipe the card and give the procedures used. Hand the card back to the happy patient. Smile, and take off for the next one.”

“Are they really THAT busy?” asked Muriel.

“Nope. Not usually,” Mata said. “There ARE times, and when that happens, very often doctors cross the lines to help out. Taylor approved it after-the-fact when the first time

occurred. Then praised them for having adapted to the situation to reach people in time. The emergency only lasted for a couple of hours. And Aretha called it in immediately. As soon as Taylor praised her, she passed the word down the chain to the others, so they know they did good."

"Hi, Muriel. GEEZ! Ten of them?" asked Aretha, translating in.

"Yep. College students from Wales. I'd hoped for more. But this makes a good start," Muriel said. "Send them in as you get done with them, please?"

"OK, I'll take a look at them, and cure whatever ails them," Aretha said, and walked back out to the kids, and started working. Ten minutes later, she was done and grinning. And ten college students were sitting in recliners in the break room. Aretha just waived to Muriel and translated back to her office.

"OK, people. The people next to you are Envoys. They're going to be your monitors and help with training. If you have questions, feel free to ask them. That's what they're there for. Also, to bail you out if you need it. The first group I handled, one boy got tangled in his clothing when he was being taught to make it. Yes, he succeeded, later. But it took Ambassador Ted and two Envoys to get him out of the mess so he could try again. So don't be ashamed to ask if you don't understand," Muriel said. Then began her litany. It took five minutes from the time it started to when the last of the kids recovered.

"And now you know why humans can grow wings like an Envoy. It's because your soul IS Envoy as it's starting point. Now, just so you know, the human personality is ALWAYS dominant. That's because it's the one with the most current experiences," she said. "Next is shielding, and following that is making clothes. And once you've made enough clothing, you'll be able to change like I did at the Senedd." And so it went. Muriel did the same thing that had been done with her friends. Took them to her now unused apartment above the office, and divided it off. Half an hour later, they were done and grinning. They took a break, then, to allow them bathroom privileges and the opportunity to get something to drink and a snack. Then, it was on to translating, and finally translating to Home. The last took almost an hour and a half to complete, since they went one at a time.

"And you go through that EVERY time you go to Home?" Tamara asked.

"Yes and no. I go through the Judgment, but it isn't that rough, because I make sure things are balanced. We'll cover that and a few extras after lunch. Just tell your monitors what you want, and we'll take care of it right here," Muriel said. "That way, you don't have to get up for a while. Just let it wash through you."

After lunch, Muriel taught them how to go deep into their soul and find their balance, then gave them the ancillary basics and the 'battlefield first aid' course. "Now, AFTER you've gotten your degrees from the University, come back and talk to us. We have courses, many of which require Envoy techniques as part of the discipline. All of them are passed to you just the way your monitors watched and helped you with this training," Muriel said. "You just pass them to your souls and you'll be good to go. And they're free. Betty will pass out brochures

for you to take with you. You know what a 'no pocket' is, now. Just tuck it in there, and retrieve it when you're back to your dorms. Now, before you scatter, there's a couple more things." And Muriel told them about the stripes, and how to control them, and applied them with the help of her squad members. Then she passed out the passports and explained about them.

"Now, you can use the Envoy techniques. That's what they're there for. You can tell anybody about your experiences. You may not be believed, but don't let that bother you. And you can train others. It's suggested that the first few times you ask for help, to monitor both you and your victim – er trainee," which caused a few chuckles. "That'll help build your confidence, and show you what to look for if there's a problem."

"Tamara, I'd like you to stay for a few minutes. Why don't you wait in the casual area of my office. OK? No, you didn't do anything wrong. Just a few questions for you," Muriel said. "The rest of you are free to leave, or just wander around." And Muriel went to her casual area to talk to Tamara.

"OK, look. I've got a dilemma. You were the first person I encountered that wasn't otherwise encumbered. Then I trained ten of you at once," Muriel said. "I don't know why, but I'd still like to make the offer to you, first. I need someone to act as Ambassador to Wales. Now, at one time, this used to be a nasty job. It's settled down a lot since then, but there's still that potential."

"What does being an Ambassador to Wales mean?" asked Tamara.

"Basically, the job involves setting up an Enclave, interfacing with the government on problems involving those that are Citizens of Home, and seeing to the training of new trainees," Muriel said. "there's minimal trade, because everything that's free is either made by Home, or in an Enclave. And everything that costs is either a product made in the country or a service. And let's be honest, Wales is a satellite country. What the Assembly does is handle purely local things. That may change over time, but that's the way it is, now. About the only thing I can think of that you would have to face with your government is if somebody decided to try to block Envoy trained people from working in Wales. And for that, you'd want me to handle it, anyway."

"OK, wait a minute," Tamara said. "You aren't talking to me. You're talking out what you're thinking, trying to come to a decision. And I'm beginning to think that it's coming to a decision based on a squeak. I was startled. You suddenly appeared, right in front of me, and I'd never seen anyone do ANYTHING like that before. I had no idea that it COULD be done. Look, would it help if I treated this like a job interview and told you about where I am, now, and where I was headed?"

"It might," Muriel said.

"OK. It's a little early. This is my final year, and I'll graduate soon. I would have graduated in June, but missed one course to make it a dual major. I'm in the Social Welfare program, and was interested in getting into law. Not as an active lawyer, but with an eye to

making GOOD law. Choir was simply something to enjoy that wouldn't scare my parents. One of the reasons that I was even in the gallery was because my unofficial mentor warned me that there would be a special meeting. And he and I have argued law since I was nine. The pros and cons of various laws, where they're bad and where good. Whether they actually do what they were meant to do. And arguing with HIM is TOUGH. And more than once, I've made my point. And he's taken it to the Assembly and made the same point."

"You're talking about laws that are being debated in the Assembly," Muriel said.

"Yep."

"OK, at the risk of this being name dropping, who's your unofficial mentor?" asked Muriel.

"The First Minister. He's a friend of the family," Tamara said. And Muriel busted up laughing.

"O-K. Then the next question is, would you LIKE to be the Ambassador from Home to the people of Wales?"

"Yes."

"Well, that simplifies things, some. But I'd like to hear from William, himself, about what he thinks of you. Would that be a problem to you?" asked Muriel.

"Nope. Ask away," Tamara said.

"OK, I was stalling until he got free. His visitor is just leaving, so I'll ask," Muriel said. "William, I've got a young lady here that says that you're her unofficial mentor"

And William Gruffydd's voice came out of the air, laughing. "Tamara. Yea, she's the reason I ended up First Minister. She's set me straight more than once about what a particular law would mean to the people. How it would affect them, things like that. And I used her arguments in the Assembly, and look what happened to me. So, may I ask why this discussion came up?"

"Because I want to hire her as the Ambassador to Wales," Muriel replied.

"WHAT!" he said, translating in. "Oh, gad! You mean that I'd have to put up with her pestering me ALL the time?"

"You're trained," Tamara said. "And the thing with the Assembly was a setup."

"Yea, and you're trained, and look to out-rank me, and you aren't even out of college yet," he replied. "Well, in that case, I guess you'd better stop calling me Mister Gruffydd, and start calling me William. Muriel, I'm biased when it comes to this one. Yea, she and I have dueled over law since she was a child. By the time she was twelve, I was using her

arguments in the Assembly, and actually sounding intelligent. I think she's taught me as much as I taught her. But what about her college degree?"

"Easily handled. Betty," Muriel said.

"I hear and obey, oh great and powerful Leader," Betty said, translating in. And Muriel hit her. "OO! Ow! OO! Envoy abuse!" she cried. And Muriel hit her again. "Seriously," she finally said, when William and Tamara stopped laughing, "the course that she's taking isn't part of any of our degrees. So, it shouldn't confuse her when she takes her final exam. So, the Ambassador's dump, plus psychology, sociology, Welsh law, British law, what else?"

"That's probably enough to start. She can always come back for more," Muriel said. Then to Tamara, "These are all the full degrees in the disciplines, not courses. You'd be able to pass the licensing requirements in any of them, as well as take the bar exams. Oh, and these are all PhD level. We don't pass out degrees that are lower."

"Is that what all those are, on your wall?" asked Tamara with wonder.

"What? Oh, those? Yea. I kinda collected them as I went along," Muriel said. "My friends made me put them up."

William, in the mean time, had gone over and was looking at them. "You've got British law?"

"Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time, since I was living here," Muriel said. "I have a lawyer that works very hard at TRYING to keep me out of trouble. I thought it might be nice if I tried to avoid the problems a little more. Mostly, I look for the holes rather than the laws themselves."

"I can believe it. But do you look for the holes as a way of getting away with something, or as a way of finding ways to improve people's lives?" William asked.

"Both, actually," Muriel replied. "I look for the holes to get things done that would help people. Sometimes, I use those holes as a way to attack the bullies of society, such as unions and businesses that try to lock up knowledge or ingenuity in technology. Actually, I don't do it alone. I look to the holes for 'what if's', then pass it to my lawyer. She's a stickler for doing things right."

"So, what you're saying is that you don't try to do it alone," Tamara said, coming out of being dumped on by Betty. Then she looked down at her lap, at the collection of diplomas laying there. "OH, MY GOSH! I just got four PhDs? Just like that?"

"Yep," Muriel said. "And no, I don't try to do it all alone. "Well, emergencies, yea. But that's because I'm an attack dog. The proper term is 'troubleshooter', but the results are that when I go in, someone's going to feel me bite. Having missiles coming at you tends to make you think VERY quickly. But for other things, I think them through and pass them past the experts I have around me to see what they think, and for them to find holes in what I'm trying

to do.”

“Muriel . . . oh, pardon me. I'll come back later,” Ralph said.

“No, that's all right. What have you got?” asked Muriel.

“The banks. America is ready to move, and I've checked with Alice and His Majesty,” Ralph said, being formal. “We've got enough to pull them in. I think you'd say 'take them down'. Oh, and the stock markets in both countries, too. Ambassador Ted and Alice both think that it should be done through the law, and His Majesty agrees. Leave the banks and stock market intact, just hit them with criminal charges for some of the shenanigans they've been pulling. His Majesty would like to talk to you about it, first, though.”

“Taylor knows where to find me. And when I'm done here, I'll go talk to him. Thanks, Ralph. This is what I've been waiting for,” Muriel said. And William's jaw looked to hit the floor. “You say that Alice has it sewn up?”

“Oh, definitely. Hard evidence of collusion, evidence of unlawful behavior in laundering money to terrorists and drug and human traffickers, evidence of stock manipulation. She's got binders that are two inches thick on each of them. She's not sure whether to set them up as individual or collective prosecutions, yet. She may want to talk to you about that. The American legal team will go whichever way you like on it. His Majesty thinks collective would be easier on the court system, particularly if it can be shown that they were all acting in concert.”

“Yep. I agree. But I want to talk to Alice about it. OK, I'll be free in a few minutes. I was just wrapping up, here,” Muriel said, then looked at William. “Oh, dear. I think I've shocked you. Yes, THIS is what I do. Tamara shouldn't have to be like this, though. A bit different from the flighty sounding girl that invaded your office, isn't it?” she added, grinning.

“My gosh! I just thought you were a mouthpiece for getting trade. But instead, I find that you're a flaming activist with TEETH,” he said. And Ralph laughed.

Muriel simply smiled, sweetly and asked, “Who? Me? I'm just a sweet, innocent girl.” And that set everyone laughing.

Chapter 7

Don't Bank On It

(Friday afternoon)

They were sitting in Taylor's office and Muriel said, "Is Melanie on board with this?"

"Yes," Ted replied. "AND the FBI and Secret Service. Arrest warrants for the officers of the banks and the stock market, and warrants to seize and examine the records of them."

"OK, Alice, what about warrants here to do the same things?" asked Melanie.

"Working on it. I should have them in about an hour. We got some resistance from one judge, so I had him examined. He's now sitting in jail. This new one didn't even boggle at it. It's just taking him some time to write all of them up. Oh, this is Crown court, not local. And we're covering all the offices all over Britain," Alice said.

"Same here," Ted said. "Melanie's already authorized us to use whatever means to pick them up. Which means Envoys requested from Home."

"We'll need to do the same here. Taylor?" Muriel asked.

"Muriel, I formally ask the assistance of Home and it's Envoys," Taylor said. "You'll have it in writing shortly. The next question is when?"

"Oh, that's easy. Sunday morning. Banks and stock market would be closed. We hit the officers in their homes, and the Envoys can translate into the banks and stock exchange," Muriel said. "No warning. Just Gestapo them out, legally, and freeze all illegal accounts or market activities. That way we don't have someone trying to wipe things and destroy evidence. OK, where do we dump the perps?" asked Muriel. "Ted has the warehouse prison. But what about Britain?"

"Working on it. I just bought a couple, side by side, and I've got Envoys from Home going over it, using the plans that America used. They'll stay on as guards for this," Taylor said. "You'll need to sign the paperwork, though. I used my money, but it needs to go in Home's name."

"You'll be reimbursed," Ted said. "You shouldn't have to use your own funds for this, though I appreciate the urgency and your need to act quickly. Let me know what the bill is, and your account will be credited."

"OK, OK!" Taylor sighed. "You're right, of course. But there wasn't time to see about getting the funding. Only partly because of the pressure of this exercise. The rest was because there was another bidder on the property. My willingness to pay cash was what tipped it."

“Oh. OK. Sorry, I didn't mean to jump on you,” Ted said. “Trust me, you'll have a use for them after this action is over. Any further problems with the building inspectors?”

“Not so far. In fact, I'm getting nervous,” Taylor said. “Things are quieting down.”

“You know,” Ted said, “I can almost understand that. “It seems like as soon as one crisis ended a new one would start. But I don't see a new one ramping up. Parliament?”

“Not that I can see,” Taylor said. “These are almost all new people, and I put them to work cleaning up previous legislation. They weren't happy, at first. But I told them that if they could show a clear and pressing reason for a legislation, and the scope of it, that I'd consider letting them discuss it. But that it was time that legislation stopped being slanted toward the special interest groups or whoever had the money.”

“It's got to be almost like grading papers in school, going over what they do, and telling them why they have to do better,” Muriel said.

“Oh, you've got THAT right. Worse, they tried foisting an entirely unsatisfactory 'government' on me – you know, the Cabinet. I took their selection for Prime Minister aside and talked with him, and discovered that he was a puppet,” Taylor said. “So, I showed him why I KNEW he was a puppet, and got him to understand why that wasn't appropriate. He went back and resigned on the spot. That forced Parliament to try to choose a new one. And they actually managed it on the second try. So, THEN I sat them down and outlined what was necessary and what was superfluous.”

“You gave them a guideline to follow,” Muriel said. “Good. Are you getting reports back from them so you know they're sticking to it?”

“Yep. Mandatory. Every morning. I think it's actually starting to work,” Taylor said.

“Well, I think we've covered everything that we can for right now. Taylor,” Muriel said, “We need to think about Scotland and what you want to do, there.”

“Oh, I figured I'd just send you ahead, and let you take over,” Taylor said, grinning. “After all, it worked with Wales.

“Goof! That was NOT the way I expected it to go,” Muriel said. “Mata made a mistake and triggered the connection on the First Minister. It DID turn out well, though. Oh, Ted, we'll be setting up an Enclave, there. Not right away, though. The new Ambassador needs to finish out a course and get her degree. Then we can think about where to put the new Enclave, and what she'll need in it.”

“OK, after this action is over, I'll take a trip over there and see what I can come up with,” Ted said.

“Thanks, Ted,” she said.

“Seriously, Muriel, I think you should do with Scotland what you did with Wales. Just offer your credentials to them, and take it from there,” Taylor said. “I think both of us there at the same time, at first, would just confuse them. I'd come up afterward.”

“Well, then, let me make a phone call,” Muriel said, and translated to her office.

Shortly, she heard, “Office of the Parliament Presiding Officer. May I help you?”

“Yes, sir. I'd like to speak to the Presiding Officer, please. My name is Muriel White, and this is about presenting my credentials as an Ambassador.”

“Thank you, Miss White. Please hold,” the receptionist or secretary said.

So, she held. And, after a few minutes, she heard, “Arline Patterson, Ambassador White. I understand from my secretary that you wish to present your credentials. Is that right?”

“Yes, ma'am. I felt it would only be polite since I should be in your country in the near future,” Muriel said.

“Muriel White, Ambassador from Home to the People of Earth, THE Leader of Home, Chancellor of the University of Home, Marshal of the forces of Home, Trainer, Troubleshooter, and consort to His Majesty, Taylor, the first. Have I missed anything?” the Presiding Officer asked.

“I don't believe so. In fact, I believe you added a few that I don't normally voice to people. Particularly the next to last, as they tend to pronounce it 'troublemaker’,” Muriel said, and was rewarded with a hearty laugh from the other end of the line. “I usually just go by Muriel.”

“Well done, Muriel. And I'm just Arline, thank you,” she said. “I must say that you recover well.”

“Well, to exchange compliments, you must have prepared for the eventuality of my calling sometime to have come up with all that so quickly,” Muriel replied, laughing.

“Touché. When would you like to meet with me?” asked Arline.

“How about now? I'll bring a squad and my security chief, of course. They aren't armed, and are more for show than anything. If I got the image right, your outer office would suffice as a translation point, and they can stay there,” Muriel replied.

“Done deal. I'll meet you there,” Arline said, and hung up.

“Fighting formals, with kilts, Muriel. We go to beard the Lion in its den,” Mata said, grinning. And a bell rang in the outer office of the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, and seven people translated in.

"So," Arline said, grinning. "THAT'S what it looks like. And I like your uniform. Seems somewhat familiar."

"It should. It's heavily modified from Scottish formal wear. I couldn't stand the idea of what the British thought was appropriate, and a friend of mine suggested this and a few others," Muriel said, and pulled out her passport and handed it to the woman.

Arline ignored it for the moment, and simply looked at Muriel's outfit. "Nicely done, and differenced properly for a woman. How do you make the plaid fly out like that?"

"An application of shields. The entire outfit is made of them. I just tell the plaid to waive, gracefully, with an image in my mind of how it should be," Muriel said, collapsing it to her back.

"And the blood stripe. You've seen action?" asked Arline, finally taking the passport.

"Many times. Everything from bullets to missiles," Muriel said. "The first time by one of my own squads. My father still has the five bullets."

"Your own squad? What ever for?"

"To prove to me that my personal shield would protect me. I surprised them, though. It didn't even rock me. I wasn't even fully trained at that point, and already I was teaching them," Muriel said.

"Well, I suppose we should get down to business, Muriel," Arline said. "Would you care to step into my office? And will your squad be all right out here?"

"Oh, they'll be perfectly safe. Both ways. Basically, Envoys are non-aggressive unless under orders. They're more apt to simply slap a shield on someone that's causing trouble than do anything to harm them. And I haven't found much that can harm an Envoy," Muriel replied, following the stately woman into her office.

"This is a very interesting document. You're a human?" asked Arline.

"Oh, yes. My parents live in the American Enclave. They're trained, and they'd vouch for the fact that I'm all too human," Muriel said, grinning. "And your next question in your mind is 'can Envoys and humans interbreed'. To answer that question, I'd have to end up training you. And, since I don't train unless the person wants to be trained, I'm at an impasse as to how to tell you."

"Hmm. Interesting answer. And you read minds?"

"Not unless I have to. And I didn't have to read yours to know that that would have been your next question, if you could have found a delicate way to voice it," Muriel said, grinning. "Trust me, MOST people's minds aren't worth reading. I've only done it under

extreme circumstances and as part of an investigation into criminal activity.”

“So, you have ethics,” Arline said.

“I have to. The balance demands it. Unless I want to get clobbered by the Judgment the next time I go to Home. And I’m in and out of there, frequently. I have friends I visit, there.”

“Remarkable,” Arline said, and handed back the passport. “OK, a personal question. Personal to me, not to you. Can I be trained?”

“Yes,” Muriel said, after a moment’s reflection. “You might have a little difficulty with the Judgment, but overall I’d say you should go through it without any real problem.”

“Who judges?”

“You do. But it’s without excuses or rationalization,” Muriel said. “If you’re at all concerned, I can have an Envoy walk you through it, here on earth, before you ever take that part of it. That way, you’d have a chance to clean up any questionable parts, and sail through it with no problem.”

“OK, is there any way I can get a copy of your credentials for the Parliament?” asked Arline.

“Of course. I’d just copy the two documents in my passport and blow them up to a larger size,” Muriel said. “Would you like them now?”

“No,” Arline said, thoughtfully. “No, I think you should present them to the assembled Parliament. Be outrageous.”

“I think I can manage that,” Muriel said, smiling. “Like ring a bell to call attention to the location, then walk down to your desk out of the air?”

“Yea. That would do it,” Arline said. “Wear the kilts. You do them justice. And it’ll drive the men crazy. Just pick an aisle that comes straight in. Not the center one. You’d go over the top of some of them.”

“Thanks for the warning. I’ll take your advice. So,” Muriel asked, “why DID you put together a dossier on me?”

“Oh. Simple. I’ve been following you since you first appeared, nine years ago. Then, about five years ago, someone put out a package of you and your friends,” Arline said.

“Well, actually, it was someones – plural. The idea had been kicking around for a while, but I hadn’t done anything about it. Talking with one of my friends, I happened to mention it. Next thing I knew, Legal had set up a company to make them, Triple E had purchased the land and put up a building, and another of my friends had made the

prototypes. Then other Embassies chimed in, and we were putting them out every month for a while,” Muriel said. “People with training get more out of them than those without.”

“Why's that?”

“Oh, my friends rigged them to be able to go through various demonstrations, and to take simple orders. Well, actually, Jeff did it,” Muriel explained. “He'd created the basic shapes, then programmed them. But you have to be able to make the mental link and be sensitive to shields to be able to activate the extras. Just like the phones, computers and tablets he created.”

“Jeff. The guy who designed the new way of making cars?”

“Yea. He's also a computer programmer, and computer engineer. He's designed some games that the software company came out with. His three dimensional worlds blew everyone else out of the market,” Muriel said. “So. Would you rather I replace the bell with some music? 'Flower of Scotland'? 'Nut Brown Maiden'? Anything?”

“You do that and you'd better have your squad with you. Do you have any men that look like they use cabers as toothpicks?” asked Arline.

“Let's go back to your outer office,” Muriel said, cryptically.

“OK. So?”

“Why don't you take a seat. I REALLY think you should,” Muriel said, and Arline, puzzled, sat. “Good. Mata . . .” And Muriel sent the generalized image of what she wanted. Mata just laughed and passed it on to the squad. And suddenly there were six 'giants' in the room, and the walls seemed to move outward from the displaced air. “Something like that, perhaps?”

“WHOA! OK. That would do it. Wait a minute. Half of them were women!” Arline said.

“Ah, yes. Envoys don't have a body. They can take any shape they need to do a job,” Muriel said. “So, when do you want me?”

“Tomorrow?”

“Not possible. I've got a previous appointment to prepare for,” Muriel said.

“Ah. The banks. I was wondering when you'd get around to them,” Arline said. “And no, I don't have a spy in your office. It's just that you've taken down just about everybody else. OK, Monday morning. We get in at nine. Will you need a microphone?”

“Nope. I can handle that small area easily,” Muriel said, grinning.

“I believe it. OK, meet me here, and I'll show you where you can watch the

proceedings and wait for your cue,” Arline said. “Give 'em hell, girl. They need to be shaken up a bit.” Muriel grinned, waived, and she and the squad disappeared.

“Well?” Arline asked her secretary.

“I’m not saying a word. But would you mind if I shut down the office, Monday morning?” the man said. Arline just laughed.

Chapter 8

William Wallace Has Nothing on Me

(Monday morning)

“This meeting will come to order . . . SIT DOWN, YOU LOT. I realize that this is unprecedented, but this meeting was called for a specific purpose. IF you behave yourselves, you'll be back in your offices, shortly. If you DON'T, you'll be in mine. IS THAT CLEAR? Good. Now sit down and I'll tell you what this is about,” Arline shouted into her microphone.

“Friday afternoon I got a request from an Ambassador to allow her to present her credentials. After a short discussion with her, it was decided that she should present them to you, rather than to me, personally. She may also tell you a bit about who she represents, and what they have to offer. I advise you to accept her credentials, whether or not you accept what she has to offer. So, Ambassador, would you, please?” And Arline sat down.

SQUAD! . . . BY THE CENTER! . . . SLOW . . . MARCH!

The sound of a lone snare drummer set the cadence, and a lone pipe wound up from a point above the aisle right of center. With the opening notes of 'Skye Boat Song', Muriel stepped out of the air. She was followed by Mata, who was followed by Chuck, who was followed by the squad in pairs. And they slow marched down to the cleared semi-circle in front of the Presiding Officer's desk. Muriel took the center point of the arc, as Mata and the squad circled her, then mounted the air to stand behind the desk. When the music stopped, Muriel took two steps forward.

“Madam Patterson,” her quiet voice filled the entire room, and brought a hush to the assembled members. And Muriel turned and faced the center of the curved rows of seats. “Members of the Scottish Parliament. My name is Muriel. I am the Leader of Home and Ambassador to the People of Earth. And I thank you for allowing me to come here, today, to present my credentials to this august body.”

“We, the residents of Home known as Envoys and the Citizens of Home that are humans trained in Envoy techniques are honored by your courtesy. Home is a universe in another dimension. One that shares many physical attributes of this one. But the residents, the Envoys differ from humans in that they do not have a physical form. They take on the aspect they need to do a job. And to show you that this is true – Mata, turn them loose.” And six hulking men in kilts suddenly became mixed male and female young adults in gray uniforms. And there was a gasp from the assembly.

“Sorry. You'll have to put up with the way I look. I'm human,” Muriel said, and that brought a laugh. “We of Home offer you something for free, to any that would accept it, and are able to take it. We offer training that can allow you to do the same sorts of things that I do. Instant communication to anyone you know that is able to establish a mental link. Power to create shields that can protect you from everything from a paper cut to a nuclear missile. A way to make clothing that never wears out, and that you can change as fast as you can

change your mind,” and she cycled through three uniforms. “The ability to go anywhere you can make an image of. And, finally, the ability to go to Home and see for yourselves that it's real. The real-est thing you'll ever see. And when you return, you, too, will be Citizens of Home and able to return whenever you like. Some of your population are already trained in these techniques. My reason for offering them again is because there are many that aren't trained and could benefit from them.”

“We do offer things for sale. Cars that can't be damaged, and never need fuel. Computers, tablets and phones that seem to do remarkable things, and that you only buy once. After that, new ones are free. Buildings and roads that don't become derelicts, and don't need maintenance. A way to have pure water, safe sewage disposal, and clean power – electricity – for your tools and appliances. And these are at a cost much less than those produced by untrained humans.”

“We offer something else, too that's free. We offer aid in emergencies. We offer the ability to gather evidence of wrongdoing for your criminal prosecutors. We offer hope for the hopeless, comfort for the destitute, sick and disabled, and out of work. We have done this in various ways in various countries, and records of them are available to you. And this, more than anything else, is the reason I came, today. Ladies and gentlemen, Members of the Scottish Parliament, I offer my credentials.” And she withdrew two standard sized pages of velum from a 'no pocket', turned, and handed them to Arline.

“Ambassador Muriel, we accept these credentials as tokens of your good faith, and will contact you with any further requests for information. And thank you for coming,” Arline said. Whereupon, Muriel, Mata and the squad translated out to her office.

“All right,” the Presiding Officer said, “The purpose of this meeting is concluded. Are there any questions? No? Good. Thank you for coming. This meeting is adjourned.” And moments later, she was surrounded by Members of Parliament asking questions.

And in Muriel's office, “So, how loudly did the banks and stock market scream?” she asked.

“Oh, not bad,” Taylor said. “At least, not here. I understand that one or two in America called in the police about a break-in. And the stock market is closed for the day.”

“This action cause them a problem?”

“Well, it's just not the way things are done, dontchaknow,” Taylor said, grinning.

“Well, what they were doing just isn't the way things are done,” Muriel said. “But nobody could get that across to them. So, now we need to watch their input and output, and make sure that they don't try to reconnect the computer sales.”

“That's Ted's problem. He knows what we did and how we did it,” Taylor said. “Same thing we did to take down the private equity. We put one of our computers across the inputs. Information comes in at a rate that indicates that computers are generating the action, and it's

thrown away. If they try to get around it, or re-route, they simply find another computer. And the same thing happens. Oh, and we let the banks and stock market know that their top officers were arrested and the records searched.”

Muriel got a grim grin on her face, and said, “Now THAT’S something I’d have liked to have seen. The expression on their faces when they found out that the officers were arrested. Any indication from them?”

“Not a squeak. I think they’re trying to keep their heads down and figure out how much damage we did to them,” Taylor said. “They’ve GOT to know by now that we froze certain accounts. That’s the next thing,” Taylor added. “Ralph is comparing what the Financial Services Authority was doing with what they SHOULD have been doing in overseeing the market. I’ve seen the preliminaries. Impressive. And I’ll be calling in the heads of the FSA, shortly, to discuss where their income comes from. Want to watch?”

“I’d love to, but I expect to be busy,” Muriel said.

“Oh? How’d it go in Scotland?”

“We put on a show. I’m expecting that I’ll be hearing about it in one form or another, very shortly, once the shock has worn off,” Muriel said, and Taylor laughed. “The one thing I DON’T have from this is anyone to be the Ambassador to Scotland. And we really need a good one, there. They’ve got problems. Well, they’ve HAD problems for a long time, but we have some of the answers for them if they want to accept our techniques. I’m hoping that scattering my card around will generate some nibbles.”

“Like fishing. You’re just waiting for a bite.”

“Yea. ‘Here, little fishy. Come take the nice, tasty bait’. The trouble is that the cards went to the Members of Parliament. And we can’t use a government representative as an Ambassador. Conflict of interest. You know, what they wanted to accuse you of simply because I was your consort,” Muriel said.

“Hmm. Yes. Muriel, you might have to take another trip to Scotland, and place cards in stores or something,” Taylor said.

“Too broad spectrum,” Muriel said. “We lucked out in Wales. Tamara has the basic knowledge of her country’s problems from the courses she’s been taking. And she just happened to be in the gallery, and she just happened to be startled by me, so that I felt I needed to apologize to her. And so on. I will admit, that it’s usually the first one to ask about the training that ends up working well as an Ambassador. Maybe because they’re the ones that are the most adventuresome.”

“Well, I need to get back to work,” Taylor said. “Meeting with ‘my government’,” he added. “Though why they call it mine when I’m not the one to select it, I’ll NEVER know. But, in any case, the Cabinet will be coming in, shortly. I’ll see you this afternoon, unless there’s some problem that involves both of us.”

"Good luck with them. At least most of them are trained, so you shouldn't have the same sorts of problems that your grandmother had," Muriel said, and kissed him good-bye. She went to her desk and began calling up information on Scottish social structure and creating a map of the various areas of influence in the country. If she was going to have to administer the area, she really needed to know what was in it.

"Huh! Now THAT'S BAD!" Mata said.

"What's that?" asked Muriel.

"Well, we just got a call, and it chopped off, partway through," her security chief said. "The most I can tell you is that it was on the regular phone lines, from somewhere in Edinburgh, near Holyrood Palace."

"Could you get a lock on the area?" asked Muriel.

"Not really. Why?" asked Mata.

"Oh, I just had this sudden urge to visit Edinburgh, again," Muriel said. "Suppose we could attract some attention?"

"Girl, you may not realize it, but you attract attention wherever you go. Remember when you were twelve, and projected what you'd look like as an adult?" Mata asked. Then went on, "Well, you made it. Minor differences, mostly because of the experiences you've been through. But you pretty much nailed it. You attract attention no matter what you wear. I . . . HOLD ON! I think I've got him. Office of the Ambassador, may I help you? Yes. Yes, she is. Please hold."

"If you've got an image, warn him that I'm coming in," Muriel said, and switched to her Class A uniform.

"Got it, and he's warned," Mata said, passing the image to Muriel, who immediately translated.

"Hello. You wanted to talk to me?" Muriel said.

"You're the Ambassador? The one that was in Parliament, this morning?" the boy asked.

"Yes, I am, and I was. My name is Muriel. What's yours?" she asked.

"Toby. How do you do those things?" he asked.

"Well, Toby, I've had some special training. Just about anybody can get it. It doesn't cost anything, and it doesn't take very long to take," she said.

"What do you mean that 'just about anybody can take it'? You only let certain people take it, like those that are rich or powerful?" he asked.

"Nope. I meant what I said. I wasn't rich and powerful when I took it. And a lot of people I've trained aren't," she replied.

"Yea? Where do I have to go to get it?"

"My office is good," she said.

"What! London? Can't afford to get there," he grumped.

"Who said you had to afford it. That's where I was just a few minutes ago," Muriel replied. "How old are you?"

"What's that got to do with it?" he asked.

"The question is whether I need to talk to your parents about you getting trained," she said. "We try to be careful not to train those that the law considers 'children' without making sure that the parents are aware of what's happening. After all, if something happens that the new trainee needs help with, we'd need to be notified."

"That happen often?"

"Nope. So far, in all the time we've been training, there's only been one. And that was when we were still trying to figure out how to train people, and how much they needed to know. A twelve year old girl got grabbed by some bad people," Muriel said. "She was on her way to Home when she got grabbed."

"So, what happened to her."

"Oh, she realized what happened, and translated back to where she was supposed to be, then back to my office on her own. But it had us scrambling Envoys all over the place to try to find her," Muriel said. "Now, she's a doctor using Envoy techniques to heal people."

"Yea, well I'm twenty two. Been on my own for four years. Parents threw me out when I was eighteen. Like I was some sort of trash, or in-con-ven-i-ence. You got any idea how hard it is to get a job if you aren't trained for anything?" he asked.

"Yea. Actually, I do," Muriel said. "And it's worse if the education you DO have is limited and confused. That's something we can do something about, too. And for trained people, it doesn't cost anything but a few minutes of time. So, what would you do with all that power and those abilities that we teach? Get revenge on all the people that have hurt you or kept you down?"

"Heh. No. Wouldn't do no good," he said. "They wouldn't learn. But it would be nice to not be picked on any more. And be able to really DO things."

“So, how HAVE you been living since your parents threw you out?” she asked.

“Mostly pickup jobs. Some fast food places will hire, sometimes. Handyman for other people, fixing up their flats and stuff, as best I can. Hard, sometimes, because I don't know how to do some things. Who's that?” he suddenly asked. Muriel turned and looked.

“Hi, Chuck. What's up?” she asked.

“Mata told me where to find you. You've got one that's interested in what I do,” Chuck said.

“Maybe. Toby, this is Chuck. He's the head of one of my squads, and does plumbing and cooking for me. Sometimes I tease him by suggesting that I'm calling him Upchuck,” which brought a snort from Toby. “He's an Envoy,” Muriel said.

“That why he looks different? Brighter?” asked Toby.

“Yep. Envoys don't have bodies. Just intelligent power. Soul,” she said, and stopped as Toby went through connecting to his. Muriel got him seated, and waited until he began to come out of it.

“Better, now?” she asked.

“GEEZ! What was that?” Toby asked.

“You just connected to your soul, and now you have a better idea of what Envoys are. So, why don't I take you back to my office, and we can finish your training. That is, if there's no place you need to be, right now,” she said.

“You're kidding! You'd do that?” he asked.

“Of course. It's what I do. It was my first job as an Ambassador. And it's still the most important thing I do,” Muriel said. “It won't take long. Then we can give you the education you need to get a real job.” And they translated back to her office.

Chapter 9

A Walk in the Park (Monday afternoon)

“HOLY COW! The whole place is full of these Envoy things,” Toby said. And Chuck laughed.

“Yea, we do kinda take over the place,” Chuck said. “We’re Muriel’s security squads. Mata, here, is her security chief. But she does a bunch of other things, too. My squad is mostly housekeeping and cooking. Betty is Education. Nancy is troubleshooting. The last squad are our diplomats. But really, we all do a bit of everything. How about something to eat. It’s Muriel’s lunch time, and she usually eats in her office. Our treat. It doesn’t cost us anything to make it.”

“How can it NOT cost you anything?” Toby asked.

“Tell me what you’d like, and I’ll show you,” Chuck said.

“How about one of those super deluxe hamburgers I’ve heard about?” Toby replied.

“Well, this might not be exactly what you’re thinking of, but I know Muriel likes them. Based on something that’s done in Arizona,” Chuck said, and promptly produced something that seemed to be larger than a person’s mouth could open. It even had an egg on it. And alongside it were what Americans call fries – thinner than what the British call chips. Chuck showed Toby how to lock the tray to his chair, then produced the same for Muriel.

“GEEZ! You weren’t kidding. Out of thin air!” Toby said.

“Well, actually, out of power turned into shields, then all the way to matter,” Chuck said. “Easy.”

“Yea, right. If it were easy then anyone could do it,” Toby said.

“Yep. And lots of people do,” Muriel said, around a mouthful. “Food, clothing, pen and paper, all sorts of things. Fix up apartments – oh, sorry, I guess you call them flats. Even whole buildings. We’ll get to all that, shortly. Hi, Betty. Meet Toby. He was a call-in.”

“Hi, Toby. I think I can fix you up with a better education. We’ll start with the basics, then add on as Muriel finds out more about you. No, nothing you have to do. Just relax and enjoy your lunch,” she said, and dumped the extended basics and add-ons into him, then the complete high school course, ‘battlefield first aid’ course, and a Liberal Arts college course at the Bachelor level as foundation for further courses.

When lunch was over, Muriel had Toby reach inside for the information on how to build a personal shield. Second try had it up and solid. Then Chuck took him off to a screened off

area of the break room and taught him how to make his own clothes and make 'no pockets' and use them. Then, it was on to translation, and Taylor took him around, without ever letting on that he was the King. And then, of course, the trip to home.

Back in Muriel's office, with brand new stripes and passport, he said, "So, that's how you do it."

"Yep. That's how we do it. And there's only a couple of things that Envoys can do that humans can't. Or at least we haven't figured out how to, yet. There's people still working on it," Muriel said. "Now, I've got a question for you. How would you like to do some administration work for us?"

"Yea, sure. I didn't even get to S5. Parents threw me out," he said.

"Education can be taken care of," Muriel said. "After all, one of my titles is Chancellor of the University of Home. As a trainee, you qualify to get any courses from the University for free. So, that's not an obstacle. If you'd like to, that is. A lot of it would be teaching people the basics, like you just got. Some of it would be overseeing projects that Home does in Scotland. Some of it would be interfacing with the government in Scotland in an effort to help more people that have gone through much the same as you."

"Me? Interface with the government? You've got to be kidding!" Toby said. "Why would anyone in the government even LISTEN to me, much less pay any attention to what I have to say. I'm a nobody!"

"Well," Taylor said, "I don't know about the government of Scotland. I've still got to take a trip there, myself. But I'm listening to you. And I'm paying attention to what you say, because it's telling me about the attitude of some of the people and why they mistrust me. And believe me, you're a somebody or Muriel wouldn't have bothered with you."

"Yea? So? Who are you that you think you're so important?" Toby asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't introduce myself, earlier. And I'm not really important. Especially in this office. Muriel out-ranks me. She's the leader of a whole universe. I'm just the King of Britain. My name's Taylor." And Toby looked at him in shock.

"It's a whole new world, Toby," Muriel said, quietly but with humor. "One phone call, and suddenly you've got people that you'd think of as important paying attention to you. Why? Because YOU'RE important. And we're just people doing a job."

"But"

"Really. Fancy titles mean nothing if you're not doing the job," Taylor said. "And, if you ARE doing the job, then you don't have to rely on them very often. Sometimes, yes. Because sometimes the only thing that some people will respond to is authority. I do what I can to get people to see past the title, and look at who I really am. And for them, like for you, I'm Taylor."

"I How could I ever call you by name! I'm a nothing. A bum on the street, living in whatever vacant hole I can find. Eating when I can filch enough, or when I can make enough money doing odd jobs to actually buy something. I cut my hair by hacking it off with a knife, for crying out loud," Toby said. "You know nothing about what that's like. You grew up rich and powerful."

"Rich, yes," Taylor said. "Powerful? Not until recently, when I finally grew up and stood up to those that were trying to control me. And I learned a lot from someone that had been bullied all her life until she was trained. Who's parents were dying, slowly, and worried about what would happen to her when they did die. And who gathered others around her that were in similar straits. And she was their leader, simply because they were following her. Now, she's got a whole universe of people following her and trying to understand her."

"Who?" asked Toby.

"Me," said Muriel. "I'm the Leader of Home and Ambassador to the people of earth. And Envoys ARE people. You know this, now, simply by looking at your soul. I had no training for the job. I was failing in school. Then I was taken to the American Enclave and was taught the Envoy techniques that I just helped teach you. And the world turned upside-down. Suddenly, the bullies couldn't bully me anymore. And a lot of them tried. I learned, and I questioned, and from those questions was born the University of Home. Of course, a lot of other things were born of my questions, too. And you'll learn about some of those if you take the job."

"So, what's the job?"

"Like I said, administrative work," Muriel said. "It's being the Ambassador from Home to the people of Scotland."

"Then, you'd outrank me," Taylor said. "Or at least have equal rank with me. And yes, you can call me by name. In here. In MY office. Anyplace where we don't have to be formal to salve the sensibilities of the unenlightened. And even then, it's just a game we play, Mister Ambassador."

Toby sat, or rather collapsed, back into the back of his seat and stared at his knees. "Me," he said, quietly. "An Ambassador. No . . . this has got to be another hunger dream, and I'll wake up cold and starving, again. This sort of thing doesn't happen in real life."

"Oh, I don't know. It happened in mine," Muriel said. "And it happened in the lives of twelve friends of mine that I brought out to the American Enclave. And it happened to a young girl in Russia. Others, too. I don't pick from the rich and famous. Taylor was actually an accident. But he managed to turn out all right, anyway." And Taylor laughed.

"Oh, girl, THAT was a put-down," he said.

"Tell you what. Why don't you go in the break room and pick a seat, and just relax and think about it," Muriel said. "You can talk to the Envoys in my squads, or even just partition off

around you and think. Whatever. I've got a couple of things I need to do, anyway. When you're ready, come back out and talk to me. We threw this at you rather fast, and you should have the opportunity to figure out what questions you have. OK?" Toby nodded, absently, and started for the break room. Chuck took charge of him, showing him where he could sit, out of the way, and talking with him.

"Things to do?" asked Taylor. "Should I leave?"

"Nope. Not necessary," Muriel said. "A phone call to set up a place for him to live, and to act as a possible Embassy." And she pulled out her phone and placed a call. "Arline, are you busy? Is this a bad time?"

"Nope. Just some paperwork," Arline replied. "What do you need?"

"Some property. Home would buy it and pay the taxes, so you don't need to panic," Muriel said. "I want to set up an Embassy in Scotland that can be your local contact with Home. It wouldn't stop you from calling me. But the Ambassador would have more knowledge of Scotland and some of its problems, since he grew up there and still lives there."

"Ooo! Mysteries. Do I know him?" asked Arline.

"Probably not. He was thrown out by his parents when he was eighteen, and has been living on the streets, taking odd-jobs and doing whatever he could to stay alive. Somehow, he got my number, and I talked with him, then trained him," Muriel said. "It isn't definite, yet, but I think he'd take the job."

"Thrown out . . . wait a minute. What's this boy's name?" asked Arline.

"Toby," Muriel replied. And Arline started laughing.

"OK, let me in on the joke. I enjoy a good laugh," Muriel said.

"Oh, this is too much. I know how he got your number. I copied it off your card, and told him to ask you if you could help him. He does odd-jobs for me, sometimes. I didn't know about his living on the street," Arline said. "Yea, he definitely knows about Scotland. He and I have talked, sometimes, about the problems the lower economic strata of Scotland have. And I've tried to get some legislation through to help them. In fact, that was why he was in my office. I have him come by on Friday afternoons to see if there's any work I can give him."

"Hmm. So, he's already been interfacing with the government. And just the way I like it. The only difference between then and now," Muriel said, "is that he might have resources to help out. Do you think it would do any good for you to talk with him about it?"

"Good question. I don't have a good answer, though," Arline said. "And if he can be trained, then I'll definitely have to find time to visit you. Oh, and I've got my secretary looking for a place. Anything in particular you'd like?"

"Vacant lot, warehouse that's not being used. Anything, really, as it would be demolished and we'd put up our own building. You realize that, as an Embassy, it would be like having another country in your country. It's own rules, and jurisdiction ends at the property line," Muriel said.

"Yea, I've read the treaty," Arline said.

"Do we need to make a specific one for Scotland?" asked Muriel.

"No, I don't think so. At least, I'll hammer on the dunderheads that Scotland IS still part of the empire, and WILL abide by the treaty," Arline said. "You really put the cat among the canaries, though, with your little show. I've had half of them in my office talking about it."

"Do you need a copy of the record? I can have it to you in moments, if you do," Muriel asked.

"I don't think so. The session was recorded, so they can always go over that," Arline said. "Sorry, I was stalling. Yea, if you can get him on the phone, I might be able to sway him a bit to taking the job. Oh, does it come with a salary?"

"Yep. Plus some other perks that anyone that's trained gets," Muriel said.

"OK, see if you can get him, then."

"Just a minute," Muriel said. ::Chuck, can you ask Toby to come back to my office, please. There's someone on the phone that would like to talk to him.: "OK, he's coming. Very puzzled, but he's coming. Here he is."

"Hello?" asked Toby, taking the phone.

"Toby, it's Arline."

"Oh, hi, Miss Patterson. What can I do for you?" he asked.

"Take. The. Job," Arline said. "Muriel just explained about you. She also told me that Ambassadors get a salary, along with other perks. And you and I have talked about the problems in Scotland, and you've made an impression on me to the point where I've suggested legislation to try to help in those areas. Muriel says that you might be able to help from the other side, too."

"I'm sorry, Miss Patterson. I didn't mean to cause you any trouble," Toby said. "It's just . . . well, sometimes things got to me. And you always seemed to be willing to listen. I didn't mean to be above my place."

"No apology. You kept me informed of problems, and I'd like to have you KEEP keeping me informed of problems. You've got a good mind," Arline said. "And I know you can talk to me, and you know I listen to you. I think it would be good for both of us."

"Well, if you say so, ma'am. I mean . . . well, it's hard to get my head around the idea," Toby said. "Me . . . talking to important people. Somehow it just doesn't feel right."

"Stick with Muriel. SHE'LL tell you. She was much like you when she started out. And she's stood up to leaders of countries right off the bat. Have her show you some of the things she went through at twelve," Arline said. "If nothing else convinces you, THAT should. I've been following some of her hijinks since she was a kid. You wouldn't believe some of the things she's had to go through. Well, I've got to go. I've got another project to handle. I'll see you in my office when you get back. OK?"

"Yes, ma'am. Whatever you say."

"Nope. NOT whatever I say. You can stand up for yourself. Do it. If she can," Arline said, "then you can. I'll expect you to treat me as an equal, at least. In fact, technically, I think you'll out-rank me. So, let's see how it goes. OK? You got that?"

"I guess so. I think I need to do some more thinking," Toby said. "'Bye Miss Patterson. Thank you."

"You're welcome, Toby," Arline said, and hung up. And Toby handed Muriel back her phone.

"She wants me to take the job," he said.

"It's not up to her. It's up to you. If she says that she wants you to take the job, she either means that she thinks she can lead you around by the nose, or she thinks you could do a good job," Muriel said. "I think you could do a good job. You already interface with the government of Scotland, even if informally. And you can talk with the King of Britain and the Leader of Home. You just need to realize that you don't have to knuckle under to people. Especially as an Ambassador."

"I just . . . I think I need to think about it some more."

"We'll take him, Muriel," a strange Envoy said. "We'll take him to 'The Welcoming One' and get him fed up and relaxed. He can bounce ideas and questions off of us and not feel pressured. We'll also get him outfitted so he feels comfortable, if you don't mind."

"Good. Thanks. Toby, these two Envoys will take care of you, tonight," Muriel said. "You can talk with them, ask questions, tell them what your concerns are. There's a room waiting for you, and no, it won't cost you anything. If nothing else, you're a trainee, which means that one of your rights is to get food and shelter anywhere there's an Enclave or other place owned by Home. We take care of our own. It has nothing to do with you being an Ambassador. This is a basic right. Come back, tomorrow, and we can talk more, then. OK?" And Muriel sighed with relief as Toby translated out with the pair.

Chapter 10

Decisions are Made

(Tuesday morning)

Toby came in, wearing what, at first, looked like a Class A uniform until Muriel took a second look. There was a difference. It was a darker gray. And the pants were different. No stripe – well, she expected that he wouldn't have the blood stripe on them. But there was no stripe at all. And they looked like they tapered to the ankles rather than just going straight down. The tunic was the Montrose Doublet style, but was the same material as the pants, and not iridescent. Oh, and instead of the in-folded 'V' of the neck cloth, what he had was two small 'tails' that formed an inverted 'V' about three inches long, and it was a lighter gray and more polished material, like silk. His hair was trimmed properly, and his shoes were polished high enough that she thought she could have seen her face in them. And, for some strange reason, she had the idea that he was making a statement with the clothing that he'd reached a decision.

“Have you had breakfast, yet?” asked Muriel.

“Yes, thank you. What IS that building?” Toby asked.

“ 'The Welcoming One',” Muriel replied. “We have people on the streets, here, too. Whole families in some cases. We needed to have a place for them while we worked on getting them back into society. In many cases, it included the Envoy training. In some cases, it simply meant giving them breathing space to re-find themselves and regain their courage to face society and find work.”

“So, you're already doing, here, what you want me to do, there,” Toby said. “I'm not sure it would work, there. Scots are hard-headed, and don't like being beholden to anyone. I'll have to think about it. Talk it out with Miss Patterson. She might have some ideas of what I could do. Oh, good morning, sir.”

“It's Taylor. Try it. It won't hurt. And in this country, it's 'stiff upper lip', but the same idea. Muriel literally has roving gangs of Envoys out looking for people in such straits.”

“You really expect me to call you by name, sir?” asked Toby.

“You call Muriel by name. She outranks me. Oh, in public, we have to adhere to archaic fashion for the uninitiated,” Taylor said. “But here, my office, or anywhere where we won't shock people it's easier to just use my name. Titles get in the way of real communication. Besides, being the Ambassador for a whole universe – well, I think YOU out-rank me,” he added, grinning.

“Very well, Taylor. I'll try,” Toby said. “It IS hard, though. Goes against everything that I've been taught.”

"Yea," Muriel said. "I had rage to bolster me when I grabbed an American President out of his office and rubbed his nose in the fact that people that worked for him were misbehaving. It irritated me that the Secretary of State was throwing missiles at me," she said, dryly. "I take it that you've made a decision?"

"Yea. Oh! The uniform. I hope you don't mind," Toby said.

"Nope, nothing hard and fast about it. Choose what you like. And that looks good on you. Nicely done," Muriel said.

"Well, I can't take credit for it," Toby said. "Some woman came to my door, and asked if she could help me. Showed me various different things, and I ended up with about six different uniforms or suits. Plus she dumped a bunch of other courses in me. Architecture and Engineering, and her method of building. I haven't really sorted them out, yet."

"Carla. She designed that building, and bossed the Envoy crew that built it. And yes, she's the one that originally came up with the uniforms I wear. At twelve," Muriel said. "There's been some changes since then, but still basically her design. In your case, she went for the more subtle look. VERY nice. Well, you should take a look at your passport, again. There's a bit of a difference," she added as he sat down.

"Really?" and Toby pulled it out. "Diplomat? Oh, my. I see what you mean," he added, as he looked inside. "Ambassador. I'll have to show this to Miss Patterson. Oh, by the way, that's not really her name. Oh, it's what she goes by, professionally. But she IS married. She just felt that it would be too confusing to people for her to change from her maiden name after she'd been running for office for a while."

"No problem. I just call her Arline, unless I have to be formal and call her 'Madam Presiding Officer', or something," Muriel said. And that brought a laugh from Toby.

"I can just see walking into her office and calling her Arline. Then picking up the trash," Toby said.

"Well, actually, you can just make the trash disappear," Muriel said. "If you don't know, now, you will shortly when Betty gives you the Ambassador's course. Might emphasize the fact that you're trained." And Toby grinned.

"Subtle outrageousness," he said.

"Yep. Let's face it – using Envoy techniques is GOING to be outrageous to some people. Trying to hide it is simply going backward," Muriel said. "Using it shows people that there's a better way to do things. And, sometimes, shows them that you're not going to put up with their old-fashioned ways. Betty, can you give him the Ambassador's course and what ever else he needs, please."

"I'll keep that in mind. Oh, I've got to ask. That woman – you said her name was Carla? – does she always seem to run right over people?" Toby asked as Betty came in,

grinning, and dumped the courses into him.

“Yea, she does come off a bit strong. It used to get her into trouble when we were kids. She's tempered that, some, now,” Muriel said.

“Really. That's tempered? I think I'm glad I didn't know her before, then,” Toby said. “But she certainly does know design.”

“Yea, she does that,” Muriel said. “Look, I'd like you to stay at 'The Welcoming One' for a little while. We're trying to find a place for your office and apartment. Actually, Carla may end up designing it for you.”

“Oh, THAT'S what she was on about,” Toby said. “She was pumping me for things I liked about Scottish architecture, and what my personality was like. I hadn't even decided to BE an Ambassador at that point. But she seemed pretty positive that I would be.”

“Oh, don't mind her,” Muriel said, grinning. “It's an occupational hazard of being around me. Anticipation of events, and trying to put things together quickly, so that there's almost no time between a decision and an action. We'll let you know when we've found a place to build on, and you can watch her in action. That shouldn't take long, one way or another.”

“Oh? May I ask why?”

“Oh, I have a friend of yours looking into a location,” Muriel said. “Well, her people, anyway. We should hear back, soon.”

“You're talking about Miss Patterson,” Toby said.

“Arline, yes. And to answer your next question, if she can't come up with something, then I'll go up myself and find a place.”

“Building codes,” Toby said. “They won't let you build your way. It would have to be just the way they want it, or it wouldn't pass. The architecture for the Parliament building took a long time to get approved.”

“Oh, goodie. A fight,” Muriel said. “We've had this fight before. We just go in and find out who's paying off whom, then the arrests begin.”

“Ouch. That's vicious,” Toby said.

“Yep. But I'm going to cheat, this time,” Muriel said. “I'm going to send up the results of the fight we had here, in Britain. That should give them sufficient warning that we won't brook any nonsense from them. Actually, it should give not only the building inspectors, but the contractor's union, the suppliers, the universities, the text book publishers, and the licensing board a warning. It may keep you busy, though. There'll be a lot of people to train.”

“I'll holler for help. That's the FIRST thing I learned from that Ambassador's course,”

Toby said. "And it's stressed all through it. I"

"Hold on, Toby, I've got a phone call," Muriel said. She put it on speaker, then said, "Hello?"

"Muriel, we have a problem. There's a good site available - well, I think it's good, you might not. Anyway, the problem is that it's an entire city block, owned by one developer that went bankrupt. He was going to put in a mall complex, and his backers pulled out," Arline said, like a machine gun.

"Whoa, girl, take a breath. OK, why don't I come up and look at it. We could do much the same thing as the developer, really," Muriel said. "You DO realize that, once we take the property it's protected under the treaty, don't you?"

"I've read it. We may be in for some interesting times. The government isn't going to want to let go of their authority over it," Arline said. "Have you got anything to counter that?"

"Oh, I think I could probably do something along those lines," Muriel said. "My analysis team is on slack time, right now, after our last little action. So, I'll give them a five minute project of pulling up all the nations that have signed the treaty, and the results of their trying to play fast and loose with the sections in it. So, how about I meet you in your office in about ten minutes. Will that be OK?"

"Fine. I have some things to sign, anyway. I'm sure I'll be able to tell when you get here," Arline said, laughing, and hung up.

"OK, gang, what do we have for dirt on Scotland?" Muriel asked, and her squads laughed. Mata just handed her a disk. "What took you so long?" asked Muriel, and Mata hit her. "OK folks. Taylor, would you like to come, too?"

"Hmm. Yea, why not. Nothing like over blowing her right off the bat. Toby, of course, should come. Do you need Ted or Carla?" Taylor asked.

"Not at this point. And both of them would still be sleeping," Muriel said. "Mata, one squad. And do you think we'd all fit in her outer office?"

"Oh, sure. Fit, yes. BREATH, maybe," Mata said. "Seriously, I don't see a problem unless there are other people there. But there is a hall outside that your squad could drop into, if necessary."

"Well, then, let me take a look. Nope. No one there but her secretary." And Muriel rang the bell and translated in.

Arline appeared just as they translated, having heard the bell. She took one look at Toby and grinned. "NICE outfit. But is that comfortable?"

"Oh, very," Toby replied. "It moves with me, instead of my fighting the clothes. And I

can set it for a particular temperature, and it keeps me cool or warm as necessary.”

“Great. Now Muriel,” she said, then stopped. “Your Majesty. I’m sorry, I didn’t realize it was you, sir.”

“Madam Presiding Officer and Member of the Scottish Parliament, are we REALLY going to start off on the wrong foot?” asked Taylor.

“Sir?”

“There’s a time and a place for formality. This is neither,” Taylor said. “You DO know my name, don’t you, Arline? After all, we may have to work together on occasion. If we have to spend all our time on formal titles, we’ll never get anything done. True, on the floor of Parliament, I’d expect you to be formal, and so would I be. But I’m not even officially here. And besides, my consort out-ranks me. Do you have a picture of the property?”

“I . . . yes, just a moment.” She went to her office, and came back in a minute with a photograph. Muriel took it, and began constructing a model of it, complete with the streets.

“I didn’t know you could do that,” Arline said.

“Oh, something I picked up from a couple of my friends. I was already using something like it in creating sculptures,” Muriel said.

“THAT is what you want us to take over? You could fit a Motte and Bailey in there,” Mata said.

“Hmm. That’s an idea,” Muriel said. “Store that for Carla, and see what she thinks. Basically, that’s what Taylor did, for the British Enclave. Here, we could modernize a lot. Taylor wanted to show a period in history, and that went over well. America was never designed to be like that. So the principal offices were scattered all over. Will the owners mind if we take a look at it?”

“They shouldn’t, since it had to be taken over by the government,” Arline said. “But let me contact the Lord Provost’s office.” A few minutes on the phone, and she came back. “Would there be any problem with him being there, since the city council are the holders of the title, right now?”

“Not to me,” Muriel said. “Is he still on the phone?”

“Yes, I was going to tell him whether you had a problem with his being there,” Arline said.

“Well, if he’s free, I can pick him up, and we can all go there together,” Muriel said.

And Arline laughed. “YOU are a WICKED woman, Muriel White. OK, YOU talk to him. I take it that that’s what you need to be able to pick him up.”

"Oh, it would help," and she went to the secretary's desk and held her hand out for the phone. "Hello? Lord Provost," she said, "this is Ambassador Muriel, the Leader of Home. Would you be free, right now?"

"Why, yes, I could be," he replied.

"Excellent. I'll be right there to pick you up. Then you and I can meet my squad and guests near the entrance," Muriel replied. She handed the phone back to the secretary, and grinned at Arline. And promptly translated.

And, in the Lord Provost's office, a bell rang, and a young woman appeared out of the air. "I SAY!" he said. "What is this!"

"Hi. I'm Ambassador Muriel. Ready to go?"

"Will it hurt?" he asked, looking stunned.

"Not a bit. You might want a jacket, though. It's a bit chilly," she replied, smiling. And a moment later, they were outside the area of the aborted construction. "We don't really need to go in," Muriel said. But my squad and I will need to take a better look. I think you'd be more comfortable on the ground. Toby, Taylor, do you want to join us?"

"No, I don't think so," Taylor replied. "I'll just stay here and keep Arline and the Lord Provost company. Take Toby. He should get an idea of the work involved in turning this into an Enclave."

"Tay . . . MY WORD! Your Majesty! I'm sorry. I didn't realize," the Lord Provost said.

"Oh, my. Here we go again. Look, sir, officially, I'm not here. I'm somewhere in Britain getting into trouble of my own. Besides, Muriel out-ranks me. SHE'S the Leader of Home – a whole other universe. I'm simply a lowly King of Britain," Taylor said, smiling. "So, at least for the time being, I'm Taylor. There'll be time enough for us to be formal when I'm officially here. And I'm sure we'll both be heartily sick of it by the time I leave."

"But . . . wouldn't that cause trouble? I mean, the lack of respect for your office, and such?" asked the Lord Provost.

"No. Oh, it reduces the level of formality. But respect and formality have nothing to do with each other. Formality is a weapon – a means of using force to get your own way. Respect is the acknowledgement of the worth of another person, their thoughts and ideas. I'll admit that it took me some time to understand how they both work, and why having respect for other people is more important. But I DID finally learn."

"Hi, Taylor. I see Muriel's trying to do MY job, now," Carla said, walking up to them.

"Actually, I don't think so," Taylor said. "Oh, and hi, Carla. This is the Lord Provost of

Edinburgh's city council, and the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament. No, I think she was just trying to get an image for you of a possible place for a small Enclave. We haven't purchased the property yet. You're up early."

"Not that early. Oh, Ted's on board if she decides to pull the trigger on this one. And I can come up with some ideas for how to do this. Parking would be the worst problem, but I think we can work around it, depending on what Muriel wants," Carla said.

"Too large for a single building, I think," Muriel said, coming back down. "And too small for an Enclave." And she passed images of the property to Carla.

"Yep. A city block. But, we might be able to do something with it. Why the high level government officials?" asked Carla.

"Oh, the city owns the property. Taken over when the developer went bust," Muriel said. "And Arline was nice enough to find it for us. Taylor, did you at least tell these people that Carla is my architect?"

"No, you rather interrupted the sequence," Taylor said.

"Well, I think we've seen what we came to see," Muriel said. "Arline, Lord Provost, we're going back to my office to discuss the possibility. You're welcome to join us in our discussion, or we can take you back to your offices, and let you know what we decide. Your choice."

"I'll stick with you," Arline said. "I'd love to see how you do things. Toby, congratulations on your new job. And you're welcome in my office any time."

"Would it be a bother for me to tag along? I can let the office know where I am if I'm needed," The Lord Provost said. "Do you people always pop in and out like this?"

"Of course. Saves travel time," Muriel said. "Then, if everybody's ready, let's go."

Chapter 11

Planning

(Tuesday morning, later)

In Muriel's office, Carla said, "Parking and traffic flow. We can use granite for building, but I'd rather marble. That much granite would be depressing. I'm afraid there's nothing we can do about traffic flow on the city streets. But parking . . . underground, I think. Well vented, of course. Now, how many squads?"

"Good question. I'd tend to think four," Muriel said. "And he'll need an apartment. Would there be room for a Guest House?"

"Oh, sure. LOTS of room for that, and for restaurants and clothing stores. Oh, and souvenirs. Thematic?" asked Carla.

"Toby, what do you think?" asked Muriel.

"How should I know. I'm just the Ambassador!" he said, and Carla laughed.

"OK, I'll show you some possibilities, and you can give me an idea of what you like and feel comfortable with. Oh, and don't worry about managing the various things outside your office," she said. "There'll be managers to take care of that, and they know their job. Or will, by the time they're in place. OK, curtain wall, low, so people can see over it," and she began sketching on her tablet and a duplicate of it showed up on Muriel's large screen. "Hmm. Two openings. One for foot traffic and one for parking. Golf carts for transportation. Inside the area, and equipped to handle handicapped people. Doctors! We need a clinic, inside." And she continued sketching.

"Lord Provost," Muriel said, "Would you happen to know the financial particulars on this property? Your asking price, and city, regional and national taxes, and such?"

"No, but I can find out," and he pulled out his phone and called his secretary. After a few minutes, he came back to Muriel with figures.

"Good. I can get these right off to Ted, and see what he says. When he wakes up, that is. Seven hour difference," Muriel said.

"No need. I'm here," Ted said, translating in. "So . . . a new one. A city block?"

"It's what was available," Muriel said. "The developer went bust when his backers pulled out. They didn't think a shopping mall in that area would be able to make any money."

"Figures. Wait until the poor guy is committed, then pull out on him. OK, price isn't bad. We're going to have to demolish everything that's there, of course, so selling it as improved property is out."

"But, what about the utilities?" asked the Lord Provost.

"We don't use them. An Enclave is self-contained. We provide our own water, power, sewage disposal. The whole country could go dark, and we'd still have power," Ted said, absently. "Yes, I think we can come up with something. Carla, we need a maintenance section, too."

"Oh! Right. Yep, we can do that," Carla said. "It won't have to be as large as the American Enclave maintenance section, though. Muriel, I think we should leave room for further growth. I'm just tossing in basics, here. But, as things go on, your new Ambassador may find that he has the need for things that we haven't thought of."

"I'm Toby," Toby said.

"Hi, Toby. I'm Carla," she said, smiling, but still obviously thinking. "OK, style. There's all sorts of things that we could do with this. Scottish traditional, New York modern, Scandinavian. Some sort of blend?"

"I hate to say it, because it sounds like I'm disloyal, but Scottish traditional is depressing. Is there a way to modernize it? I mean, give the effect, but in a more modern style?" asked Toby.

"Sure. Just like we did with your uniform," Carla replied. "Mostly by simplifying it, and using more modern materials. So, let's see what I can come up with." And she began sketching again.

"OK, Lord Provost, here's what we offer. Oh, that's a cash offer, by the way," Ted said. And for taxes for the city, here's the figure. We pay one hundred years in advance. Bank that, and only pull off what the allocation is, and it'll last you much longer than one hundred years. I'll be doing the same with the region and national taxes."

"Oh, my. It's a good thing I was in real estate before I got into politics," the Lord Provost said. "I see what you did there. Ten percent off the price for paying cash. And the tax figure for the year multiplied by one hundred, then deduct ten percent. I think they'd go for it. Even though it fixes the tax rate at what it is now, the fact of guaranteed income should offset it. Let me make a couple of phone calls. It'll save you running around to the offices."

"Thanks," Ted smiled. "That would be helpful." And the Lord Provost was back on the phone. It took about twenty minutes of talking before he was finished and hung up. But he was smiling when he did so.

"I talked with the three tax offices. They'll be willing to meet with you in my office, and we can formalize this. I also talked with the committee chairman involved in selling this property. I won't use the words he said, but he was agreeable with the disposition," the Lord Provost said. "The only possible obstacle would be the building inspectors."

"If you have their number, I can call them and deal with that, I think," Taylor said.

"My WORD! NOW I begin to understand how you people do it. Amazing!" the Lord Provost said. "Yes, I have their number, here. And you're always like this? Everyone chiming in and doing their part, and offering suggestions as you go along?"

"Yep," Ted said. "I thought I was relaxed, then I met that young lady over there, and found out what a relaxed speed could REALLY do. She expects people to know their job and do it. She just coordinates with them, and does her own part."

"I'm afraid that would never work in politics," the Lord Provost said.

"It can," Taylor replied. "But first you have to get rid of the special interest groups, and teach people to realize that the people – the population as a whole – comes first. And that means REAL discussion, based on REAL facts about the population. That's one place where Toby can help. So can the police, if they ever get trained up there and start the resource squads. It's one of the reasons that I WILL be coming up, officially, soon. Now, let me call that building inspectors number, and see if I can throw my weight around a bit."

"Take a squad with you, Taylor," Muriel piped up. "You may need it. To protect them," she added, and grinned at him.

"Smart alecky women," Taylor muttered in a loud voice. "Never think that a man can protect himself."

"Hmm," Muriel replied. "Seems like when the shoe's on the other foot, it pinches."

"I'll show you where the shoe pinches," Taylor said.

"Go ahead. It'll just prove that you're stuck on me. Literally," Muriel laughed. "Go on. Enjoy yourself. Holler if you need help."

"I'll do that. I'll holler for Ted," Taylor quipped back.

"Now WAIT A MINUTE! You two leave me out of it," Ted hollered. "I've got enough problems of my own. I don't need to babysit you two, too."

Taylor just laughed, and called the building inspectors office. A few minutes later, he hung up, fuming. "Arlene, were you aware that the building inspectors in Scotland weren't following the latest rulings concerning building specifications?"

"No, I wasn't. Where?" she asked.

"Edinburgh. Ralph," he said and sent, "you and one squad. Colonel Jackie, I want two squads of the Regiment, please. We're going hunting. Muriel, you stay out of it. This is MY fight. The same fight we had here, in London."

"Then you'll need backup with the contractor's union," she said. "And the licensing board. Mister Lord Provost, you may want to go back to your office, now. Things are about to get rather heated in Edinburgh." And Taylor translated out.

"Why? What?" he said.

"Taylor made it plain, a while back, that the standards being used, here, were out of date and downright dangerous," Muriel said. "He crushed the contractor's union, here, AND the licensing board was wiped out. The building inspectors suddenly realized that it might be best to go along with Taylor's edicts. So, they avoided being shut down. The method is to simply arrest the heads of the contractor's union and licensing board for taking money from the suppliers. Corruption like that has fallen off, dramatically, since then. Ralph is a 'Crown Special Investigator' with authority to arrest. So are the Regiment of Home authorized. He's going to go collect some people and charge them with bribery of government officials, collusion, price fixing, things like that. This time, the building inspectors may be involved, too. And yes, we have that information on them as hard evidence. Taylor was going to talk to them about cleaning up their act when he went up there, formally. You may need to see about putting people in place that are NOT on the supplier's payroll."

"Good point. Could one of your people take me back, please?" he asked.

"No problem, sir," Ted said. "We need to get the financial arrangements out of the way, anyway." And he translated him out based on Muriel's imaging.

"OK, so where were we?" asked Muriel.

"We've got the basic structures, the overall design for the Enclave, and the setup for Toby's office, including the decor. What we DON'T have yet," Carla said, "is how he wants his apartment. Looks like two days from signing to finished. Mata's working on the squads, now. And she's put in a request to Home for Envoys to staff the Enclave, and with the skills that are needed."

"OK, I may have to leave at a moment's notice. Toby, how comfortable are you with translating?" Muriel asked.

"I can do it. No, that's not bravado," Toby replied. "The Envoys at 'The Welcoming One' ran me through some translations, both from images and from my own memory. I can translate Miss Patterson, if necessary."

"I can see where I may need to take the training," Arline said. "Is it ALWAYS like this around you?"

"Only if I can help it," Muriel said, grinning. "We go hunting bullies. And we go armed with enough evidence to hang them in court. And I've got a lawyer that believes in only taking on 'slam dunk' cases, which means that we have to have MORE evidence than usual. When we were getting ready to address the problem with the banks and the stock market, here, there was a waiting period while Ted got ready to coordinate the take-downs in America.

Taylor re-tasked Ralph to looking into the possible problems with Scotland, preparatory to his traveling there. So, we already had the evidence needed, and Alice – my lawyer – had passed it as being sufficient.” And suddenly, she stopped talking, and looked like she was somewhere else.

“SQUADS!” Mata yelled. “Utilities and 'Special Investigator' triangles. Muriel, contact Colonel Jackie. We may need backup. Doggone building inspectors. They mobilized the contractor's bully boys.”

“I'm coming with you,” Arline said.

“Arline, we wouldn't be able to protect you,” Muriel said. “Things could get hectic. OH! Never mind. Colonel Jackie's already sent a company out after Taylor. Arline, I'm afraid that he'll be translating the people out of Scotland. You just don't have enough storage space for all of them. Taylor's rolling up both the building inspectors and the contractor's union. And he's got Envoys from home locating all the records. We have a warehouse prison, here in London, where they can be held until you figure out what to do with them.”

“What to do with them is simple,” Arline said. “If they attacked the King, then they're up for treason. And any accomplices, too. Conspiracy to commit treason. And the reason I wanted to go along is because I SAW the edicts, and the reason for them. They'd already been pointed out to the building inspectors and contractors, and were told to follow them. The edicts were ratified in Parliament, so there's no excuse that 'oh, it doesn't pertain to Scotland'. They knew.”

“May I ask? What convinced you and them to ratify it?” asked Muriel.

“We saw the specs on that building you put up. Impressive. Designed like it was made out of normal materials, but stronger. And built faster,” Arline said. “Taylor sent along a disk of all the information, including how it was built. Really impressive. I didn't even have to argue the issue with them. Just show them the information, and they passed it, unanimously.”

“You do realize that we may have to do much the same with the Universities and text book publishers, don't you?” asked Muriel. “The number of people that come out of college and can't find work is appalling.”

“I know. And I know why,” Arline said. “If you can do something about that, I'd appreciate it.”

“Miss Patterson, I have a question for you,” Toby said.

“Well, I'm not going to answer until you start calling me Arline. We're going to be working together for a while. No sense in making it more difficult on ourselves, Toby,” she said.

“Very well, Arline. Would there be a problem with my wearing a Balmoral in gray, with the Home logo for a badge?” he asked. “I know the military use them”

"As far as the Balmoral goes, no problem. But that's Highlander. I thought you were from Edinburgh," Arline said.

"No, I came down when my parents threw me out," Toby said. "I figured I'd have a better chance of finding work, here."

"Well, you did that," Arline said. "As for the logo, you'd have to ask Muriel."

"Balmoral. That's the one like a beret?" asked Muriel. "Show me." And he created the Balmoral in gray. A slow smile crossed her face. "Come with me. I think we can do something with this." And outside her office, she turned his head to the right, and applied the Home logo as a badge, then stood back and went into full display.

"WHOA!" Toby said, startled. Muriel simply grinned and shook her wings.

"You can do this, too, you know. Ask your soul," she said. Then added, "Oh, ME!. I'm molting! Molting!" sing-songing and mis-quoting a witch in a movie. "There. Two feathers. And just let them try to say that they're from a protected species. These are falcon style, and MUCH larger than you'll find on any natural bird. You may have to duck going through doorways, though. Oh, only two. As an Ambassador to a country, you'd rank as a clan chieftain."

As they went back in, Arline was looking at her with her jaw dropped. "Yea, we can do that, too," Muriel said. "Comes in handy, sometimes. Especially when talking to religious bullies. Tends to take the wind out of their sails."

"But . . . that would mean" And suddenly, Arline was going through the connection. Toby reached her, first, and just kept talking to her until she came out of it.

"Oops," Muriel said. "Sorry. We'll have to finish you up, now. I hope you don't mind."

"No. I was considering asking you about the training, anyway," Arlene said. "That building"

"Yea. Carla worked from a number of images from a number of sources. The sculpture, inside," Muriel said, taking down the miniature she had on her shelf, "was done from nine images taken all at once, after the building was built. Carla would have been better off just asking me to go into full display, and getting nine people to record it at once."

Chapter 12

Acquisition and Deployment (Tuesday afternoon)

“Arline, we'll have to rush you through this in order to get you back to your office. So there's some that I'd suggest you not try, afterwards, until you've had more practice with a monitor,” Muriel said. “All right?”

“Yes. Of course,” Arline said, still staring at Toby, then Muriel.

“Arline,” Muriel said. “I'm human. Honest. But now I think you know where your soul came from. At it's base, it's Envoy. And now you also know the much older word for it.”

“And I thought you were being outrageous coming into Parliament in kilts. You weren't. You were just being you. WOW!” Arline said. Betty came in and delivered the methods and procedures that had been developed from Muriel's training techniques, and that made the 'refresher' training so much easier.

“OK, shields first,” Muriel said, and showed her. And the instructions kicked in. Arline got it on the second try.

“My turn, now,” Carla said. “You just DON'T know clothes.”

“Well, not the way you do, anyway. Upstairs. It's empty. And it better be clean or I'll be having words with Chuck and his squad,” Muriel said, and Chuck laughed. And Carla translated Arline to Muriel's bolt hole – the apartment that pretty much duplicated the one in the American Enclave.

“You said anyone can do it? That display, or whatever you call it?” asked Toby.

“Oh, sure. Outside. You'll need the room,” Muriel said, and walked him out. “Now, just tell your soul what you want to do, and let it do it. It might help if you have a bird in mind. Or just relax and let your soul choose.” Toby looked thoughtful for a moment, then the wings appeared. He didn't seem to notice, and still looked thoughtful.

“Hmm. Golden Eagle, I think,” Taylor said, coming up behind Muriel. “Huge, too. I don't think you'll have any problem with his being strong enough for the job.”

At the sound of Taylor's voice, Toby looked up. Then to either side. “Holy Cow!” he said, then flexed them. “And they're real! Muriel, Arline said something about you wearing kilts when you went to her office. I think I can pay you back for the falcon feathers, if you'd like. I might need help figuring out how to do it.”

“No problem. Just think about molting the number of feathers you want to lose. Oh, and the next time you display, they'll be replaced,” Muriel said. And Toby shook the wings

and three dropped out. He thought for a second, and the wings disappeared. Then he bent down and picked up the feathers.

"You'll have to make the Balmoral the way you like it," Toby said. And Muriel changed to the kilt version of formals. Then set up a mirror, and created the Balmoral using the same type of iridescence and sparkle that her tunic had. She added the Home logo to it, then took it off and placed the feathers behind the logo.

"There's a trick to putting it back on," Toby said. "Grab it by the back. Place the front about one finger width above the eyebrows, and draw the back down until it's snug. Then take the toorie – that's that little dangle, like a pom-pom, on top – and draw it to the right some. That's it."

As they walked back into her office, Muriel noticed that SHE had to duck to get through the doorway. And she was shorter than Toby. OK, she thought, *I'll have to remember that*. Carla and Arline came back to the office, and Arline looked shell shocked.

"I finished her up. She's just take a whirlwind tour of the American Enclave, and a trip to Home. Did pretty well for an older person," Carla said. "I was surprised. I didn't think someone in politics would do so well."

"So, did you give her her stripes and passport?" Muriel asked.

"Stripes, yes. Passport, no. She asked me if it would be all right for Toby to do it," Carla said. "Does he know how?"

"If he doesn't, he will," Muriel grinned, and turned to Toby.

A moment later, he said, "So THAT'S how it's done. Yea, I can do it. I might ask you to hold my hand through it, though."

"No problem. That's what we're here for," Muriel said. And Toby turned to Arline.

"Are you sure you want ME to do this, Arline?" he asked.

"Yes. Carla was telling me that you haven't acted as an Ambassador, yet. I'd like this to be your first official act," she said, somewhat dazed.

"OK, then, if you'd look in your 'no pocket' for a little green booklet" And she did. And smiled.

"Toby, I'm so glad that you made that phone call. I wasn't sure that Muriel could help you. But I'm happy that she could," Arline said. "And this makes me feel that I did my job as Presiding Officer of the Parliament of Scotland."

"What? Because I could give you a book?" asked Toby.

"No, because you gave me a book that it takes an Ambassador to give. I don't know why, but that's the way it is," Arline said.

"It's the Logo, Arlene," Muriel said. "Only Ambassadors are taught how to make it like that. There's a couple of twists involved in it that aren't intuitive. And I'm thinking of tipping the feathers you gave me back a bit," she added to Toby. "I had to duck to come in. And I'm shorter than you are." And Toby laughed.

"Yea, we probably could slant them back a bit more," he said.

"When you get done there," Taylor said, dryly, "we rolled them all up, including the suppliers. They're in the warehouse prison we used for the bank job. We've also got their records, and the evidence we need to put them away for a long time. And yes, we DID get warrants before we did the job. Letting a Scottish judge know that they'd attacked a King helped. But having the background on the other activities cinched it. The Commissioner knows, and is getting ready to process them. And Alice sent someone over to the prison to collect, or at least go through, the evidence we collected."

"And the property is now ours," Ted said. "Signed, sealed, and delivered. I signed for you, Muriel, as your agent. Well, actually, on behalf of Home. Nobody boggled at it, and they knew I was American. Or at least the Ambassador to America."

"Then, I guess it's my turn," Carla said. "And I'll teach Toby how to build."

"Lunch, first," Muriel said. "He's not going to work on an empty stomach." And Chuck arrived and started taking orders.

"There's something else he needs, too, Muriel. His squads. The only thing we don't know is whether he wants them to be mixed, or all male," Mata said.

"Or all female," Toby said. "But, I think mixed would be best. It seems to work for Muriel. But, if it's all right, perhaps the security chief should be male."

"Good. Then they don't have to change," Mata said, and Toby laughed.

So, while they ate, Toby's security chief and squad leaders came in one at a time and introduced themselves. Toby surprised Muriel when he took the time to get each of them to make a deep link with him. Muriel had finally gotten around to doing the same thing, but didn't realize that Toby even knew about the trick.

Toby noticed her surprised look, and said, "One of the Envoys at 'The Welcoming One' suggested it as a way to help me over the rough spots of getting used to being an Ambassador. I'll probably do the same with the squads, themselves, as I go along. Carla, can I take them along. If you're going to make me work, then maybe they should have a chance to join in the fun."

"Fine with me. In fact, it'll make it easier for you, later on. Basically, I'll be showing you

how to build. And you'll be learning by doing," Carla said. "YOU'RE going to build your Enclave. It'll give you an advantage that Muriel didn't have in America. You'll know every inch of it before you're done, and know what you can change easily, and what you need someone like me to help you with."

"Design. THAT'S what I need help with," Toby said. "That's obvious. But yes, I WOULD like to know how you do it. Even if it's just so I know when to call for help."

"Muriel," Carla said. "I LIKE this man. Not only does he acknowledge his limitations, he wants to learn more about them and what his limitations are. GOOD attitude. So, let's see if I can get him to learn how to go beyond his limitations, and when to know when he shouldn't."

"Well, if you manage that, then you'll have taught him more than I know," Muriel said. "How many times have I had to be bailed out?"

"Only twice, that I know of. When Caleb had to bail you out, and when Mata had to call you back. The rest of the time you created your own troubles," Carla said, seriously. "But that one time was bad. And we didn't know if we were going to lose you. NOBODY knew what you were going into, or what effect it would have on you. But maybe we can keep Toby from going through the same sorts of problems."

"So, why this one and not the others?" asked Muriel.

"Because he's too much like you. He's got the rage," Carla said. "You could help, you know. How do you temper that rage. I know you learned how, but none of us know how."

"I'm not sure I do, either," Muriel said. "I just do it. Mata?"

"It's an interesting question, Carla. And one that we'd have to research, some. Can we get back to you?" asked Mata.

"Sure. In the mean time, if he's finished with lunch, and since I'm finished with breakfast, why don't we go play," Carla said. And they translated out to the sight. "First thing we do is to create a shield around the property, to keep people from wandering in and getting hurt. We're going to make it look like glass, so that people can see in. But it'll be a lot stronger than glass. Stronger than steel. It'll take a nuclear blast without any trouble. After that, we'll simply destroy everything on the property and down to four levels deep. That's where the parking will be."

Carla passed the method of creating the shield to Toby, and he and his squads did the work, then she checked it. Next came the destruction, and it amazed Toby that it would cause no dust or noise. Just simple destruction. Building the sub-levels fascinated Toby, since there didn't seem to be any ventilation for the underground parking. Then Carla explained that each level had its own power converter that sucked the air out of the level, and replaced it with fresh air manufactured on the spot. He also noticed that there were no ramps between the levels, and found out why when they reached the top. The levels would be reached by an

elevator powered by a converter that would generate a shield. And there were actually two elevators, since one would be used for taking cars in, and one for lifting them out.

Then came the curtain wall, high enough to keep people from just wandering in, but low enough for an adult to see over, as seen from the sidewalk. This was predominately blue marble, but with 'towers' at the corners and various intervals made from granite. The top of the wall was crenelated, as such curtain walls for castles would have. And Toby began to get the idea. This wouldn't be an actual motte and bailey, but the idealized idea of one. And he grinned. Next, came the 'roof' of the underground parking – a slightly sloped sheet of granite, a foot thick, with grooves to simulate individual blocks. The blocks were not polished, thus avoiding the possibility of their being slippery in rain or snow.

"This is all shields, you understand," Carla said. "But made to look like natural materials. We didn't actually need the support pillars in the underground parking, but they'd be expected by building inspectors, and it doesn't hurt to have them. This sheet is equivalent to steel reinforced concrete, but with the added strength that only shields can provide, and without the expansion that you'd get from normal materials. And I'm actually anchoring it into the curtain wall, which is grounded in the outer walls of the underground parking. Oh, and this sheet of 'granite' is set to be warmed when the ambient temperature drops below forty degrees Fahrenheit – about five degrees Celsius. Sorry, I don't do conversions well in my head. Anyway, the point is to keep snow and ice from forming. Oh, and the slope is to cause the water to run off to the edges, where it's collected and moved to the local aquifer."

"THAT'S why those pipes in the walls!" Toby said.

"Yep. Now," Carla said, "We're going to put up the shells of the buildings we KNOW we want. And we're going to do this in a way to allow for expansion. The construction will be much like the curtain wall – a mixture of blue marble and granite accents for the main buildings. Things like the shops, maintenance section and clinic will have the look of Scottish cottages, only larger. And yes, they'll look like they have thatched roofs, but will actually be fireproof, as we'll prove to the building inspectors if they ask. Now, I'm going to make a suggestion, and you can veto it if you don't like it. I'm going to suggest that the main building contain your office, one restaurant, your law offices, and the Guest House."

"Any particular reason why?" asked Toby.

"Actually, there is. First, it provides more room for expansion. Second, it's more in keeping with the idea of a keep inside a walled structure. But third, and you may not remember this, but I can show you images of it, it's what we did for the building used for signing the agreement between countries and the Enclave of China. By the way, that building no longer exists. It was built for one purpose, and then destroyed and the land used as part of the Enclave in Russia. But the basic idea was quite successful. It makes optimum use of limited space without feeling crowded, and allows for room for expansion, should you need it, for the Guest House. Oh, your apartment would be directly above your office, and only accessible to you and your squads, unless YOU decide to translate someone into it. And your apartment can be expanded that way by sacrificing one or more suites in the Guest House, for when you take a mate and have a family."

“Oh, my! You DO try to think of everything,” Toby said.

“Well, I've learned, over the years, that flexibility of design is everything. My only stake in design is that it meet the customer's needs, interests, and likes and still looks as beautiful as possible,” Carla said. I've done ultra-modern structures in some cities that normally wouldn't even catch the eye of a passerby. But if they DO, then they realize how well they fit with the surrounding architecture, but go way beyond it. Here, though, we're TRYING to stand out. It's thematic without being a theme park.”

So, then the basic structures went up, and Toby began to realize what she meant by flexibility. The building for his office and the Guest House covered one side, and parts of two others. That allowed for the wings to be expanded. Restaurant, male and female clothing stores, souvenirs, and clinic were opposite it, on the wall with the walk-in entrance, off the main street. The parking garage was reached from a side street, to decrease the possibility of traffic congestion on the main street. Then, Carla did something that surprised Toby. She created raised sections of grass in the areas around the buildings, creating paths or sidewalks between the buildings. And then Toby realizes why doors to the buildings, and their floors, were raised up a couple of inches, and there were ramps to the doorways. This kept water out, but made the buildings still look to be grounded and wheelchair accessible.

“OK, tomorrow we'll finish up. Starting right after your lunch time,” Carla said. “Tomorrow night, you'll be able to sleep in your own bed in your own apartment. And the entire Enclave will go live the next morning for you.”

“Carla, this is amazing! I can see why construction companies would object to this kind of construction,” Toby said.

“Yea. It's been a battle. Hopefully, one that won't come back, here,” Carla said. “Can you find your way back to 'The Welcoming One'?”

“No problem. But I may show Muriel what's been accomplished, first,” Toby said. “I'll see you tomorrow. And thanks.” And they translated to their separate destinations.

Chapter 13

Grand Opening, and Nearly Grand Closing

(Thursday morning)

Carla was true to her word. Right after lunch, Wednesday, she and Toby and his squads went back out to the site and finished the interiors of the buildings. Even there, he noticed, there was flexibility allowed for, as the individuals that used the shops and restaurants, and the doctor for the clinic, made their wishes known. The Guest House was an exercise in duplicating types of rooms and suites – one suite for every three individual rooms, and mirror images of them, to allow for plumbing and power to go through common walls. And all sound-proofed.

The law office was still basically a bare office, until lawyers could be recruited to take over. And Carla promised to come back and finish that up once they had them. But Toby had enough knowledge, by then, to be able to at least put in desks and such to hold them over until Carla could get back. True to her word, Toby's suite was directly above his formal and casual area of his office. And there was no door to the hall. Access was ONLY by translation, and restricted to him, his custodial squad and security chief, and who he would allow in. And his office was a dream. Bright and sunny without having direct sunlight coming in through the windows. And a landscape right out of the highlands for walls. Furniture was in a Scottish style, and long and thin predominated the look, but were modernized and made more comfortable for actual use.

Toby's office was on the left as one entered the building, and was a reverse of Muriel's office, with the on-duty squad being next to the outside windows, and facing them, and his formal and casual area to the right of them, with a glass wall and doors for him to see visitors coming – and laugh when they paused for the 'whoosh' doors. The lawyers office was next to that. And across the wide entryway was the Guest House restaurant, large enough to hold a hundred people at a time. More where groups gathered around one table. Then, beyond that, was the casual area for Guest House, where guests and visitors could sit, relax, and even hold miniature conferences. Carla had suggested a conference room for Toby, but they settled for a multi-purpose training room, such as 'The Welcoming One' had. Toby had enough knowledge, now, to be able to add and remove furniture as he needed to.

Thursday morning started with breakfast in his suite, courtesy of one of his squads. Then downstairs to remove the glass walls around the Enclave, and put up the shield that would protect it from any harm – like an over-sized personal shield. With the help of his squads, this only took moments.

And then, he was surprised. Two of his squads took to the air and created rings between the entrance and the Guest House, fifty feet in the air. What followed was a very energetic game of 'air hockey', complete with the fanciest of maneuvers that he had ever seen. He was so stunned by the display that he didn't notice Arline come up to him.

"WOW! OK, that will attract attention," she said. "So that's what Muriel's 'air hockey'

looks like. No wonder she said that it's good training for emergencies and for air forces."

"Yea. First time I've seen it, too. Good morning, Arline," Toby said, grinning at her. "Isn't this glorious? I still can't get over how she managed to capture the feeling of old Scotland with new materials and designs. And in so small an area!"

"Mmm. Yes. And a feeling of peace, or at least relaxation, despite the activity going on around – and above us," Arline said.

"So . . . is there something I can do for you? Or were you just here to look around?" asked Toby.

"Maybe a bit of both," Arline said. "I wanted to see this place, and it surpasses anything that I could have expected. I see why Carla's so well thought of. But I also wanted to see if there was anything I could do for you, or that you could do for me."

"Well, as I understand it, I'll mostly be here to do training and field any problems I see, outside," Toby said. "Things like meeting with the police and seeing about getting them trained, and getting resource squads out to the poorer areas. Oh, and drawing in some of the younger crowd and getting them trained."

"Well, that display up there certainly ought to attract them," Arline said. "Toby, would you be adverse to presenting your credentials to Parliament?"

"Nope. Oh, I wouldn't put on quite the show that Mureil did," Toby said. "Just a quiet walk-in and introduce myself to them, and let them know that I'm their local contact to Muriel and Home. Eyes and ears to what your needs are, and a voice to let you know what's available or what needs she has or sees."

"OK, that sounds good," Arline said. Then they were interrupted.

"You, there," said an officious voice. "You're under arrest!"

::Arline, don't turn around. You shouldn't be implicated in this,:: Toby sent. ::It's a policeman that obviously has never seen the treaty. I'll deal with him.::

"Excuse me, but I think you may not know where you are, or who you're talking to," Toby said.

"Don't need to know. You're obviously not a clan chieftain, and you're wearing feathers from a protected species. Now get over here and don't make it hard on yourself," the officer said.

::Muriel, I may need some help,:: Toby sent, and added the situation.

"Mister, I don't know you," Toby said, "and I'm sure you don't know me. However, you are outside your jurisdiction, and have been since you passed the entrance through the

curtain wall. And on top of that, you're addressing an Ambassador that, technically, even outranks the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament. Then, to cap it, you claim that the feathers in my bonnet are from a protected species. Tell me, sir, have you ever seen a bird large enough to produce feathers this big?"

"Boy, that does it," the officer started.

"Not really," said a woman's voice, behind him. "That only starts the trouble you're in, mister. Turn around," Muriel commanded.

He did, and found himself facing . . . a belt buckle. As he looked up, he realized that it was a woman. Worse, it was a woman with wings, the feathers of which were obviously the source of the two on Toby's Balmoral. Then he noticed something else. She was angry. And she was also wearing a Balmoral, and had three feathers behind the badge. He turned back around, and found himself facing . . . another belt buckle. He looked up, and noticed that this man also had wings, and they appeared to be the source of those in the woman's bonnet. And he, too, was angry.

"We are, in fact, a protected species," Muriel said, rotating the officer back around. "But not because of some law. We provide our own protection. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Muriel. I'm the Leader of Home and Ambassador to the people of earth. The man behind you is Toby, Ambassador from Home to the people of Scotland."

Toby rotated the officer back to facing him and said, "Now, mister, you've just managed to piss off two of the most powerful people on earth. This Enclave – the entire property – is an Embassy of Home, and under HOME rules. And you've broken the only rule that we have. You've broken the peace. You will therefore be arrested and charged with violating the Treaty of Home," Toby said. Whereupon the officer did the worst possible thing he could have done. He drew and fired on Toby.

"Well, Toby," Muriel said. "It's earlier than I expected of a conservative country, but you've just earned the blood stripe for your pants. Welcome to the elite. Now, let's get the Commissioner, or whatever they call him, here, and dispose of this trash." And a moment later, the head of the Edinburgh police force was standing beside them. He looked at the officer, then his attention was drawn to Toby removing the bullet from in front of his chest. And he looked back at the officer in horror.

"You didn't. Please, tell me you didn't fire on an Ambassador?" he pleaded. And Arline turned around. "Oh, god! You did. And in front of witnesses. All right, there's no saving you from this one. I'll have to arrest you," he added, and took the man's gun, and proceeded to cuff him.

"Commissioner," Toby said, resuming his normal appearance, "I want to see you in my office as soon as you've disposed of this person. Don't dawdle."

"Commissioner," Arline said, "I've contacted your office, and a car is on its way to transport both of you. You know who I am. I could demand that you also come to my office,

but I think this can be dealt with, here, in Ambassador Toby's office. Oh, and Commissioner, I know how to find you. If you aren't here immediately after dealing with this . . . person, then I WILL see to it that you're back here against your will. Ambassador Muriel, may I ask you to also attend, as the Leader of Home and the one person in this empire that even outranks our King?"

"Delighted to assist, Madam Presiding Officer Patterson," Muriel said, smiling, just as a police car pulled up. The Commissioner took his prisoner off to the car and they left. When they were gone, Muriel busted up, laughing, and Arline joined her.

"Toby, that was well played," Muriel said. "I caught what you wanted to do, and it worked perfectly. It WAS a bit of a surprise that the man fired on you. Are you all right?"

"Shook, but I'll be fine. So, that's what it's like to be shot at," he said.

"Arline?" asked Muriel.

"I was watching in the reflection in the window. I couldn't believe that he shot at Toby! Toby offered no threat," Arline said. "Intimidation, yes. But threat? No. Nor did you. There was no call for that! And a police officer!"

"Toby," Muriel said, smiling, "you can tell how excited and upset a person is by the way the exclamation points slap into place." And Toby laughed. "Let's get this shook up Presiding Officer to some place where she can sit down."

"Right. Come on, Arline. We'll take care of you," Toby said. "Muriel, what do I do with this situation?"

"The situation, itself? Exploit it to get him to allow you to train officers, and set up a resource squad. One, to begin with," Muriel said, "but hopefully more in the future. Or, do you mean with the officer? That's out of your hands. He blew it. His career is over, and a good chunk of his life, too, since he'll spend it in jail."

"I don't know if you realize it," Arline said, as she sat in Toby's casual area, "but there's a certain amount of nepotism in Scotland. That was the Commissioner's nephew that fired on you."

"Oh, GEEZ! That's not going to make brownie points with me," Toby said.

"Actually, it will. The Commissioner was shook – horrified – by what had happened. AND that HE had to take his nephew in. You could make it work to your advantage," Muriel said.

"What? Let him off?" asked Toby.

"Nope. But reduce it to community service. And that community service being working here, with you, finding out what you do," Muriel said.

"Yea. Right. While I'M trying to figure out what I'm doing here," Toby said. "But you're right. Take him around and let him SEE what poverty is – what those on the bottom of the heap have to deal with. Arline," Toby suddenly said, "is there a way to get me the authority to arrest?"

"I don't know. Muriel?" asked Arline.

"You already have it. In here, definitely," Muriel said. "Outside? It would have to be coordinated with the Commissioner. Technically, you rank as a Special Investigator for Home, under the treaty. Taylor opened that up just a little while ago. Check page two of your passport. However, getting the Commissioner to accept it MIGHT need Taylor's 'interference'."

"Talk about testing my authority and ability right off the bat," Toby said with an ironic smile. "However, it's what faces me, so I'd better be about it. He should be back soon. I'm going to ask, how would you handle this interview? I'm disinclined to simply have him stand there while we hammer on him."

"Good instincts," Muriel said. "I agree. I'd sit him down and offer him something non-alcoholic to drink, and a chance to catch his breath. You know, the courtesies one would offer someone who was just coming in to talk with you in a casual way."

"Hmm. Yea. I see what you mean. 'More in sorrow than in anger', and compassion for HIS position, and blow off what effect it might have had on me," Toby said. "That way I can be magnanimous toward him, and try to make a friend of him. YES! I see where you're going."

"He's fast, Arline," Muriel said.

"I know. He always gave me good information," Arline said. "And well documented, too."

"OK, well, it looks like our victim is approaching," Toby said. "You two stay seated while I greet him. Then we'll see if I can get him relaxed down some." And as they watched, the two squads that had been playing 'air hockey' landed, and a squad leader accompanied the Commissioner to Toby's office, only breaking off when he'd been pointed to Toby's casual area.

"AH! Commissioner, welcome!" Toby said, smiling and rising to greet the man and shake his hand. "I'm very sorry about the disturbance this morning. It's NOT the way I wanted to meet you. I'd intended to pay you a call later, this afternoon. Come. Have a seat. Can we get you something to drink? I'd suggest non-alcoholic, since we DO have some business to discuss. I believe you already know Arline Patterson, the Presiding Officer of Parliament. She and I have had occasion to speak over the past couple of years or so – discussing problems with poverty in this country and possible ways to address it. And beside her is Muriel, the Leader of Home and Ambassador to Earth. Rather famous person, so I understand. I'm so sorry that your nephew was involved in that incident. Of course, as you

can see, there was no real harm done. Those with the Envoy training are well able to protect themselves. And from what I understand, from much more than a little thing like a bullet.”

And Muriel and Arline sat there grinning at the way Toby ran right over the man and introduced himself and his abilities – stretching them, some with respect to the two women – and setting the Commissioner up for the training. But, as the Commissioner was finally seated, and Toby resumed his recliner, he continued. “Now, I've talked with Arline and Muriel,” he said, emphasizing that he knew them well enough to be casual with their first names, “about this unfortunate incident. We can't see putting the poor man in jail for something that actually caused no harm,” and he crossed his legs, emphasizing that his pants now held the blood stripe down the seam. “We were wondering if you'd be amenable to our simply taking him in, here, for a time. Let him see what we actually do here, and why this IS an Embassy. Would you consider such an arrangement?”

“I . . . uh . . . if you feel that that would be sufficient, sir,” the Commissioner said.

“It's Toby, Commissioner. I expect that we'll be doing quite a bit of business together in the future. No sense wearing ourselves out with formality,” Toby said, and Muriel almost laughed. Taylor had done his job well, getting Toby to understand WHY he tried to be casual with people he had to deal with, regularly. “I expect the young man now realizes that pointing a gun at an Envoy trained person is useless, and actually firing at one is merely a minor irritation. Oh, and before I forget it. Feathers. Yes. Perhaps you noticed that I wear the feathers from Muriel's wings on my Balmoral. Likewise, she wears the feathers from my wings. And yes, it's something that Envoy trained people can do. Rather easy, once you catch the trick of it. So, NOT a protected species under the law, but definitely protected by our own devices. You know, YOU could probably be trained, yourself. Or if not, then certainly some of your men. It's one of the things that I wanted to speak to you about. I understand that there are resource squads working out of the Metropolitan Police in London that have done good work in turning depressed areas into more law abiding and respectable neighborhoods. It's even reduced some of the gang violence. I was wondering what your views on it might be.”

“I . . . uh . . . I really don't know,” the commissioner said. “It isn't something I was made aware of.”

“Ah, well. I'll have to ask Taylor if he'd mind sending up some of the records and results,” Toby said. And Arline's jaw dropped. Muriel simply had to turn a laugh into a cough. Toby was not only running right over the man, but name dropping outrageously. Calling the King by his first name, like he was a casual friend. Now THAT was the sort of thing that Muriel would have done.

“Muriel, do you suppose your consort would be willing to drop by and see this Enclave, and drop off that information for me?” asked Toby.

“Well, I don't see why not, Toby,” a male voice said, laughing, and Taylor entered his office. “I brought some support of my own,” he added. “Alice was coming this way to discuss how to set up a plea-bargain for the judge. Maybe we can combine the meetings, since we're

all here.”

Chapter 14

Bothered, Bewildered and Befuddled

(Thursday afternoon)

The aftermath of the meeting was almost a foregone conclusion. The Commissioner wanted, desperately, to find a way to save his nephew, and here, the man that was attacked, was offering him MORE than he could expect. The poor man was too nervous for lunch, so they simply trooped to the court, the Commissioner called ahead to the prosecutor and got him to attend, and to the court to get an emergency hearing.

Then Alice presented her credentials to the court as Muriel's barrister, and acting on her behalf as attorney in fact for Toby. Then it was Arline's turn, acting as character witness for Toby. Then Taylor, wearing formal whites and putting on the crown just before speaking. Then Muriel and all her titles. And each adding the plea that the plea-bargain be accepted. The judge, never having had to deal with so high powered a group before, immediately accepted, and got them out of there as quickly as he could. And hoped that he'd NEVER have to deal with them, again. He immediately took fifteen minutes break to allow his nerves to calm down. Seeing the King in his court, in full formals, and realizing that both he and the new Ambassador to Scotland had the blood stripe on their pants disturbed him. But Muriel! She wore the same kilt formal she'd used for Parliament, and the blood stripe on the kilt and plaid were bad enough. But the matching kilt hose made it obvious. This was a woman that, despite her quiet ways, had succeeded against armed action.

So, the assorted trained and untrained individuals returned to Toby's office, accompanied by a very subdued ex-police officer. There, the young man was escorted to the male clothier's to receive a gray uniform. Arline was all for having the broad arrow emblazoned on it. Toby vetoed it. He maintained that he wanted to try to convert the man to a better attitude, and he couldn't do that if he were marked as a British prisoner. Especially, since some of the work they would be doing would be going out to some of the worst neighborhoods to find out what was happening and trying to see what could be done about it.

"Well, Commissioner Ferguson, will that do?" asked Muriel.

"Ma'am?" he replied.

"Had your nephew pulled that stunt with a normal human, there would have been injury or death. And he could, potentially, be looking at life in prison," Muriel said. "And your brother would probably have never spoken to you again. And yes, I'm coming down hard on you, but for a reason. One of the problems with ANY authority is when it's given to those that can't handle it, responsibly."

"Hold on, Muriel. I know where you're trying to go, but I'm going to counter it. Mister Ferguson and I have met, before, but he may not recognize me, now. This," Toby said, "is how I used to look."

"THE GHOST! Toby Cameron, what kind of a scam are you running, now?" Ferguson hollered.

"None. None then, and none now. Just trying to stay alive. And, as I said in your office the first time we met, YOU'VE got a problem," Toby replied, changing back. "Nope. I'm honestly an Ambassador to the most powerful and peaceful nation that has ever been. And, I was honest then, too. I always gave value for value. Many times going out of my way to do a better job than I was being paid for. But, because I looked like a scum-bucket, I had police all over me, trying to catch me. You caught me, once, and couldn't hold me because the 'evidence' fell apart. I mean, really, trying to say I stole a ring that the man was wearing on his right hand? Give me a break! And the officer knew it. You want a scam? THAT'S where the scam was. I hadn't even done any work for that man. And I made DAMNED sure I never did AFTER that event. So, I became the ghost. The guy you couldn't find, anymore. You were looking in the wrong place. You should have tried Arline's office. Taking out trash and scrubbing the loo."

"And talking to me about his experiences, and what the problems were with being poor," Arline said. "There comes a time, Ferguson, when one has to stop playing Sherlock Holmes and pigeonholing people based on how they appear, and start realizing that people have problems that need to be solved. And one of the places to look to see the problems is in the records of the police, IF THEY'RE HONEST! Are you honest, Mister Ferguson? Toby Cameron . . .," she broke off and looked at Toby. "Cameron? Really? Oh, my. Well, that's for later. Anyway, Ferguson, Toby gave me a LOT of information on the plight of the poor and homeless. Did you know that a lot of the work he did he never got paid for? Because the people were too poor to even afford a couple of slices of bread to pay him. Imagine their feeling of shame, that someone they KNEW was worse off than them was helping them, and they couldn't repay him in any way."

"This is all very interesting," Taylor said, reminding the Commissioner – very uncomfortably – that he was sitting next to the King of Britain. "It's too bad you don't have a record of some of these talks. They might even be applicable outside of Scotland."

"What do you mean 'it's too bad I don't have a record.' Hold on," she said, pulling out a phone. "Craig? That two inch binder of Toby's talks. Could you get it for me? I'll wait. Dum-de-dum-dum," she hummed. "Got it? Good. Just put it on your desk. Yes, thank you," she said and translated it to her lap. "What? Of course I've got it! Information, for His Majesty. Yes, I'm sure he'll give it back to us. OK, 'bye." she said and hung up. And by this time, one of Toby's squads had taken the notebook and duplicated it, handing the copy to Taylor and the original back to Arline. "Oh, this will confuse poor Craig," she said, and translated it back to his desk. Taylor and Muriel laughed.

Toby said, "I didn't know you wrote them up! Whatever for?"

"Because your arguments for the poor were good. And I used what I could to try to relieve the suffering. There wasn't a lot we could do, between money constraints and the attitudes of society, here. But we may be able to do more, now," Arline said. "Maybe you should go back through them and see if there's something you can use as an Ambassador."

"Now there's a GOOD thought," Toby said. And his security chief handed him another copy of the binder, and Arline started laughing.

"You learned from Mata, my security chief, didn't you," Muriel said, grinning.

"Yes, ma'am, I did," he said, emphatically. "Anything to try to stay ahead of him."

"You know, Ferguson, YOU could learn something from these people, too," Arline said. "I know I did, even before I met any of them. I was fascinated with Muriel from the time her little episodes at twelve started making the news. And I watched her as she developed a method of working. She believes in getting all her ducks in a row. But, for her, that row is one behind the other, so that one shot takes them ALL out. Evidence, Ferguson. HARD evidence that isn't manufactured to fit. The real thing that takes time to find and develop. And I'll bet that this young man with his four squads could help you get that evidence. And all you have to do is ask. But you won't, will you. Ah, well. We'll just have to wait for the next election and see what happens."

"Kyle," Toby said, as the young ex-officer came into the room, "come. Sit here, beside me. No, I'm not going to holler at you or make fun of you. The whole reason we worked out that deal with the court is because I hate to see people wasted because they're put in positions they don't know how to handle. What I'm going to do is show you the people of Scotland. The poor, the desperate, the ones living in the streets. And you and I are going to come up with ways to help them, either through government or through the techniques of Home. You'll learn, over time, that the ones that took you to the clothing shop weren't your guards, but your friends. And so are the rest of the Envoys in this office. And, I dare say, so are many of the humans, if you'll let us be your friends. But it's up to you. The court has given me two years to see if I can help you. I don't think it'll take that long. In the mean time, you have food, clothing, medical attention as necessary, a place to stay, entertainment – in short, all the things a true guest would have. This isn't a punishment, but an opportunity."

"Yea. Right. Bunch of weirdos with some magic tricks," Kyle said. "And I'm stuck with you."

"Well, if they're just magic tricks, would you like to learn how to do them?" asked Toby.

"What! So I can be weird, too? No thanks," Kyle said, glaring at Toby. "I'd rather go to jail."

Toby calmly made a mug of tea. "Oh, sorry. Would you like some?" he asked, and made a second, holding it out to the boy-man. "It's just tea. A bit strong, perhaps, but that's the way I like it."

Kyle stared at the mug that hadn't been there a moment before. And at the steam rising off of it. "Careful," Toby said, "it's hot." And Kyle reached out and took the mug, tentatively, sniffed it, and took a sip.

"BLOODY HELL! How'd you do that," Kyle demanded.

"That's just one of the tricks I know," Toby said. "And you can learn them all. It doesn't take long. But learning them will cause you to see us differently."

"Yea? And why is that?" asked Kyle.

"Because, Kyle Ferguson, you'll discover who you really are. And from there, you can learn to do all the things that I can do, or Muriel can do," Toby said. "Or our King, Tayler, can do. Want to ride a ghost horse? He could teach you. He invented the idea. And he used to be the head of the 'Jolly Greens'. Or how to stop a bullet? Muriel, the Leader of Home, could show you. She's stopped bigger things than just a bullet. Want to know how to build things like this Enclave in only a couple of days? A friend of Muriel's did it, using my squads and I, so we know every inch of it. She could teach you. But you have to be willing to learn."

"Yea, right. Willing to learn. You go to school for twelve years, then they tell you that what you learned isn't enough to get you into the thirteenth, sorry, we don't need you. Go away and find a job," Kyle said. "Except that there aren't any jobs. And the only thing you can get is a job as a cop, and only because your father was the brother of the police commissioner. So, you do your best to try to understand what they tell you, and the first time that you see something that's obviously against the law you end up being charged with attempted murder because some privileged fop with money says that I threatened him. And now, instead of seeing that rich bastard in jail for breaking the law, it's me has to follow him around, like he was something special or something."

"Yep. Life's not fair," Toby said. "Except sometimes it is. You're not alone, you know. There's a lot of you out there, outside the walls of this Enclave, that feel the same way."

"Yea? How would you know?"

"I was one of them. You didn't hear what your uncle said, a few minutes ago," Toby said. "He recognized me. He wanted to know what kind of scam I was running, now. Know what he called me? 'The Ghost'. I was living on the streets, sleeping in whatever hole I could find, scrabbling for handyman jobs fixing people's plumbing or electric wires. Sometimes for nothing because the people that I was working for didn't have anything, either. And then I lucked out. One of my jobs put me in touch with someone that could actually help me. So, yea, I understand what you're saying. So, what can be done about it?"

"You? Living on the streets? Come on, man, what do you take me for. People like you don't live on the streets! Hell, man, you've got it made. Rich friends, pretty clothes. You don't have anything to complain about," Kyle said. Toby simply changed to what he'd been wearing when Muriel had taken him in.

"YOU? That's you? What are you playing at?" Kyle said. "Does it make you feel good to come down here and try to lord it over us? You think changing clothes makes a difference? No wonder people couldn't find you. You'd just off and away back to your rich house and laugh about the little people."

"Oh, I changed locations, all right. I left the area I had been working and tried my hand where some of those rich people were," Toby said. "I still slept in the same holes, but where I worked was different. And this is what I was wearing when one of those jobs turned up a tip. But because I was willing to take a chance, because I was willing to learn, now I can wear stuff like this," and he changed back to his uniform.

"How'd you do that, man? How do you change clothes like that?" Kyle asked.

"Same way I can make a cup of tea. I just make them. Really. It isn't illusion, it's real. You know. You drank some. Can you drink an illusion? Can it burn your lip?" asked Toby. "So, now I'm right back in the area where I used to sleep. Where I used to try to help people as best I could. You want a laugh? This was a failed shopping mall. And it was one of three places that were relatively safe for me to sleep."

"You're kidding!" Arline said. "You mean to tell me that we actually picked where you were living as a place to set up your Enclave? Now that's just too funny," she added, laughing.

"Yep. I think, if I remember the layout right, that the clinic is about where I used to crash. And no, you didn't displace anyone. There were only three ways in. One was through the contractor's gate, if you had the key. One was through a hole, about where this Guest House is located. Trouble with that was that it was in plain view of the street, and there was a lot of dangerous materials to try to get past without them falling on you," Toby said. "The third way was harder, and MUCH scarier in some ways. Over the top of the fence, about where Carla put the underground parking entrance. There was a small gap in the barbed wire at the top of the fence. So, I'd go along the street like I was drunk and mumbling, and no one would pay attention. And when traffic slacked off, I'd up over the fence and drop down in the only safe place for me to drop into. Miss, and I'd have been dead, under a load of building materials that were stacked haphazardly. Then weave my way through the maze of stuff stacked there, waiting to fall, and finally into the hole I'd made to look like more building materials poorly stacked. How does a ghost disappear? He goes where he can't be seen."

"Was there anyone in here besides you?" asked Taylor.

"Nope. I'd have known. Street people can be dangerous. They don't have anything, and nobody pays any attention if they rob from each other. And they aren't gentle about it," Toby said. "No, no one else had found a way in. Oh, and I checked before Carla and I destroyed everything here. I wouldn't have been able to live with myself if I'd allowed anyone to get hurt or killed to make this. So, Kyle, no scam. I lucked out. And you've got the same opportunity I had. To learn. To be able to do things like you never imagined. To live like you were rich without having to spend a penny. How did I make that cup of tea, Kyle? How can I do what looks like miracles? Would you like to know? It isn't a fake. No fraud or scam. It's real, man. And you can do it."

"So, why don't I believe you?" asked Kyle.

"I don't know," Toby said. "I guess, the only way for you to believe me is to ask if you can learn. You've seen some of what I can do. I've got news for you. That's only a small part of what I can do. You saw Muriel, huge, and with wings like a falcon. MUCH larger than any bird. You saw me, huge, with wings like a golden eagle, and MUCH MUCH larger than any bird. And yes, they're real. Real enough to get feathers from to put in our bonnets. And what gave us the ability to do that is in you, too. Who has wings?"

And Kyle began to shake. Toby capped his cup with a shield, so it wouldn't spill, then took it and set it down, while grabbing one of the boy-man's hands, and started the soothing words to help keep Kyle focused. Taylor put his arm out to stop the Commissioner from going to his nephew.

"It's all right, Ferguson. He's not being hurt. It takes a little bit to complete the connection, then your nephew will be much more than he was," Taylor said. "I know. So does Muriel. So does Arline. Your nephew must have been close to be able to make the connection on so little information. And Toby knew. And had to work pretty hard to get past the shell that he'd made around himself. So, now, we'll work with Kyle to help him understand what has happened to him."

Chapter 15

What's the Use of Trying

(Friday morning)

The rest of Thursday afternoon went pretty predictably. Kyle was trained, though it took a couple of hours. His mind still tended to resist the possibilities opened up to him until Toby had him simply look deep into his soul. After that, things moved right along, and only the Judgment was a boggle. That clobbered the poor guy.

Taylor and Muriel went back to London, taking the Commissioner to his office on the way. Arline translated herself back to her own office. And Toby stayed with Kyle until he finally got over the 'never-get-overs' of the Judgment, and realized that he could do something about it. Toby let Kyle go early, and Envoys from the Guest House took him to his room.

And now it was Friday morning, and Kyle was sitting in Toby's office, wearing clothes that he'd made, himself, and just looking at his passport. "It won't go away, you know," Toby said. "It's the most real thing that there is. You're a Citizen of Home, now, and can go back whenever you want. You've got millions of friends all over the world that you don't even know. You've got bolt-holes in every property owned by Home. You don't have to work, unless you want to, since you can make everything you need."

"So, what do I do, now?" Kyle asked.

"What do you WANT to do?" asked Toby

"I don't know. The only thing I knew was being a cop. Well, that's gone, now," Kyle said, despondent.

"Maybe. Maybe not. We may be able to work something out," Toby said. "A lot depends on you. And we can find that out fairly quickly. I'd like to take a walk around and see what I can see of the neighborhood. And I'd like you to come with me."

"Do I have to wear one of those silly hats?" asked Kyle. And Toby laughed.

"No. And I probably won't wear one for this, either," he said. "That's for when I need to be more formal. Oh, and I ought to check in with Arline Patterson."

"What for? She's Parliament, not city," Kyle said.

"Yes, and I'm Scotland, and not the city. Though I'll cover the city, too. And a lot of other cities and villages," Toby said. "We just take it one step at a time. Solutions we find here may work in other areas, too. That's one of the things we need to look at. In addition, we need to see that laws are being enforced, properly," and Kyle winced, "and that they serve ALL the people, and not just one segment."

"You expect to do all that, alone?" Kyle asked.

"I've got a lot of help. Envoys, for one. Muriel and His Majesty, for another. And believe me, they're formidable. Even Arline and the Lord Provost, to a degree. This way," Toby said, as they exited the main entrance to the Enclave. "There are people I know around here, so we may be doing a spot of work on flats and such."

He was right. Not more than a block away was a woman struggling to get a two wheeled cart full of groceries up the steps to her apartment house. "Here, let me," Toby said, taking the handle.

"Oh, thank you sir," she said, then took another look. "Toby?"

"Yep. I got a job. How's the plumbing doing?" Toby asked.

"I think the sink is still leaking, Toby. What am I going to do? The landlord won't fix it. Or anything in the apartment," she said.

"OK, I'm going to call in a few friends to help. No, not rowdy boys. Just some friends I met, recently. They'll help me fix your place up," Toby said. "Oh, this is Kyle. I'm showing him around and giving him an idea of what I do." And he sent a message back to his security chief, and he and three squads showed up just as they reached the woman's door on the third floor.

"Donald Dubh, this is Elizabet, and she's had problems getting the landlord to fix up her flat. When we get done doing his work, I want a background check on him – financials and contacts – and I want to know how many others in the area don't want to keep their property up to code. Oh, and if he's not the owner, we need to do the same with him," Toby said.

"Squad two is working on it, sir. I've got one squad doing plumbing and another electrical and gas. The third is working on the structure and walls, and they'll all do cleaning when they're done," his security chief said. "We should be done in a few minutes." And indeed they were. ALL the plumbing worked properly. Areas where there had been leaks were repaired, and the walls re-papered with the same pattern that had been there originally. Even the impossible stains in the toilet were removed. And everything was clean! Something that the poor woman had been unable to do properly for years.

"Hmm. You know, a lot of this could have been done by normal humans. I happen to know what church she goes to. I think I'll just have a little talk with the paster. It's about time that the church did some good for the people, and stopped telling lies," Toby said. "Kyle, I'm going to show you how to do something that I probably shouldn't, right now. But I'm going to do it anyway. When we leave, we're translating back to the Enclave for a few minutes. THEN we'll pay a visit on the paster of that church."

And so it went, and Kyle found that his wings were that of a Red Kite – a type of hawk that had been on the endangered species list in Scotland, and was just coming back. Toby located the paster of the church, and translated to his location. Unlike Muriel, that used a bell,

Toby used the crack of a lightning bolt. Well, it got their attention. And 'they' it was.

"Hello, paster. Living pretty well, these days, aren't you. When was the last time you checked on the poor of your parish?" asked Toby.

"Who the hell are you? And how'd you get here," the man said.

"Me? Oh, a nobody that you didn't want to help. Just like you don't want to help the poor in your congregation. I've been doing your work for you," Toby said. "And recently I've had some advanced training on how to get around and how to help others. And I've been putting it to use. As to who I am, my name is Toby, and I'm the Ambassador from Home to the people of Scotland."

"YOU? Toby? Nonsense. Toby's a scruffy good-for-nothing bum," the paster said. "I've tried to get the police to arrest him numerous times for theft, and they said they couldn't find him." Toby just took out his passport and handed it to the man. When the paster read the name inside, he blanched.

"I got a job," Toby said. "And a lot of training." Then he was interrupted by the entrance of his security chief, who handed him a piece of paper. "Thanks, Donald. That explains a lot. Paster, you and your crony have a lot to answer for. I've just been to Elizabeth's flat, and it was in terrible shape. Now, I KNOW that you've been asked to fix things there, and I know that you've refused, through the offices of your building manager. So, I've had to go in, both when I was 'the ghost' and now, just today, and do repairs. Well, that shoddiness is over. The church OWNS that property, and cares not a whit for keeping it up. I know for fact that it wouldn't pass a building inspection for tenancy. So, I'm passing the information back to the Lord Provost, the Presiding Officer of Parliament, and His Majesty. Oh, and I'm putting a watch on the building. You will NOT throw people out. Nor will you raise the rents there."

"You young whipper-snapper! You can't talk to me like that, no matter what this obviously forged document says," the paster said.

"Actually, I can. If you look on the next page, you'll find that I'm a Special Investigator for Home, and authorized to arrest under British and Scottish law, as per the Treaty of Home." And Toby sent to Kyle to move so that they could go into display. "That takes care of the authority. And as for the forgery, do you think that you could forge this?" he said, and triggered the display. And Kyle followed suit. "Really, paster, you ought to get out of the fifteenth century and start looking around you." And Toby took back the passport by pulling it from a 'no pocket'. "Now, if you don't want the property taken away from you, I suggest that you have it fixed up. Now. You can do that by hiring contractors to do the work, or you can ask me, the representative of Home, to have the work done at a lesser, but not insubstantial, cost. Your choice. Here's my card. If I haven't heard from you by Monday morning, then criminal action will be taken against you. On ALL the properties that you've let run down." And he and Kyle resumed their normal appearance, and translated back to the Enclave.

Kyle's eyes were as big as saucers when they got back. "I can't believe you talked to him like that! Don't you know that he's got powerful friends?" he asked.

"Of course I do. They're part of the contacts that Donald Dubh came up with. And the financials are VERY interesting reading," he said, as they walked to his office. There was a surprise waiting for him when he got there.

"Well, well, well. Couldn't wait a minute to get started, I see," Muriel said, grinning. "Take a breather. I've got the whole thing from your security chief. Why do you call him Donald Dubh?"

"Oh, he introduced himself as Donald. I suggested the change. It goes back to the first Chief of the Cameron Clan as it's known, now. Actually, that's a misspelling for the sake of the British. It's actually Domhnall Dubh – Black Domhnall. The closest in English is Donald. And yes, he plays up to it. And Donald stood up and switched to kilts. But they were the Scottish kilts, not the gray. They were navy blue, green, black, red and yellow – a dark tartan that looked like dried blood from a distance. And he had the full plaid, such as pipers wear, rather than the fly plaid that Muriel had adopted.

"Oh, my. Impressive. Toby, Domhnall, I like your style. And now I see why you came down so heavily on the paster. Taylor and I saw the building, and peeked at the apartment you fixed up. Nicely done, both of you. AND your squads," Muriel said. "Taylor's seeing to the warrants, and I've already alerted Arline to what's happening. She said she'd call the Lord Provost, so he'd know. But you missed a point. If it goes to criminal action, WE take over the apartments."

"Yes, I know. But he was having enough trouble swallowing what I'd already told him," Toby said. "It's hard to face someone you've looked down on and realize that they're now more powerful than you."

"Hmm. Interesting point. And I don't think it would have made any difference, anyway," Muriel said. "Oh, here's a little bit for you. The developer that used to have this property? That's who the paster was talking with. We tracked him through the image that your security chief sent us. Toby, you hit the ground running. And you've justified my putting you in the position. Thank you. OH! How's Kyle doing?"

"Red Kite. We both went into display for him. Anyway, what about the rest of the properties?" Toby asked.

"We've got the list. And, we know the pastor's supervisor, and are suggesting to him that the man isn't doing his job. Arline is furious. She didn't know that people were living in conditions like that, and that the landlords were getting away with it," Muriel said. "There WILL be changes. And no, you didn't overstep your bounds by saying that you had arrest authority. Arline made that plain. The Treaty was ratified by the Scottish Parliament. That meant ALL of it. And all the changes have been ratified, as they came up. She called up some of the leading people in Parliament and talked with them. If you feel you need something from them to back it up, they'll be happy to provide it."

"Well, that just saved my skin," Toby said. "I wasn't sure, but thought I could push the

envelope a bit on that one.”

“Nope. You were right,” Muriel said. “I notice that you don't use a bell when you translate.”

“Nope. 'The crack of doom'. I may switch out, later. But right now, if I translate in, I want them terrified right off the bat. Saves trouble later,” Toby said. “I saw some of the situations you were in. I won't say you were wrong. But I WILL say that you were gentle in most of them.”

“Miss Muriel,” Kyle spoke up, as the conversation died down. “I need to apologize to you and Toby. I was way out of line.”

“I don't accept apologies, Kyle,” she said, gently. “I accept changes in behavior. And it looks like you're starting on that way. Now you know. YOU can make wings, too. And I pulled up an image of the Red Kite. Attractive bird. Did you choose it, or did your soul?”

“It must have been my soul. I've never seen one,” Kyle said. And Muriel put the image up on Toby's big screen for the boy. “Oh, WOW,” he said. “Do the wings actually work?”

“I have it on good authority, from the Envoys, themselves, that they never used them to actually fly. They were an effect, like the flaming sword. They never actually used THAT either,” Muriel said. Then she put up another image. “However, I used it to good effect.” And Toby and Kyle stared at the view of the papal throne with the sword through it, and the words on the wall.

“Yea, I'd say you got the point across. And buried it,” Toby said, chuckling.

“By the way, I don't want you to get the wrong impression. I don't care what people believe. That's THEIR problem,” Muriel said. But when they start using it to bully others, even of their own congregations, then it's time to make it plain that they've overstepped their bounds. They were even getting into politics in America, to the point of getting politicians to sign pledges that they'd only vote a certain way. Religions DO do some good for people that can't take their ethics straight. But when they start trying to tell ME what to believe, or start demonizing their own children for being trained, then it's time to step on them. Hard.”

“I can accept that,” Toby said. “And I see why you're so adamant about people ASKING to be trained. That way, it's THEIR decision, not something that you impose on them.”

“Exactly,” Muriel replied. “Arline saw it, even before she was trained. Now, though, with this mess with the buildings, she's just plain flabbergasted that it's gone on so long. And Commissioner Ferguson is going to get his ears pinned back about this. HIS people should have been looking into this.”

“Miss Muriel,” Kyle began.

"Drop the Miss. It's just Muriel. You're trained. So am I. We both have jobs to do," Muriel replied. "I don't use titles until I have to take someone down for their behavior."

"V-V-Very well, Muriel. Is there anything that says that a trained person can't be commissioner?" Kyle asked.

"Nope."

"Um, I've got some learning to do, I think. But, well, would I be out of line if I ran for the position?" Kyle asked.

"Not from my stand point. You might want to talk to Arline and the Lord Provost, though. And is it really something that you want to do?" asked Muriel.

"I think so," Kyle replied.

"Then may I make a suggestion? Try for Chief Constable of Scotland. You've got a new format going into place – or maybe it already IS in place – to unify the police and fire organizations that are being regionalized. You'd still be able to work within the cities, with the local police organizations, but would have more power to enforce the national rules," Muriel said. "We'll be sure you have the necessary education to cover it. Think about it, and let Toby know what you decide. And he can have his security chief, or one of his squads give you the courses you need. And good luck. I'll be rooting for you. Well, I need to get out of here. I just wanted you to know that we're behind what you did, and you did well. We'll see about getting resource squads set up, too, so your squads don't have to do the whole thing. But I must say, they did a great job."

Chapter 16

The Use of Trying

(Monday morning)

“Any news from that paster?” Toby asked Domhnall Dubh.

“Nothing, Toby. Did you really expect that you WOULD hear?” his security chief asked.

“Of course not. But one must observe the formalities,” Toby said. “Oh, and something you didn't know. All that time the police were looking for me? There's a bus stop half a block from the main entrance to this Enclave.”

“So?” Kyle asked. And then the quarter dropped – inflation, you know. “Oh. You were staying here, in the abandoned construction site. But where were you going to?”

“Arline's office, usually. I cleaned up, there. Emptying trash and stuff,” Toby said.

“But . . . didn't the offices have their own janitorial crew?” asked Kyle.

“Yea. They did. It was Arline's way of making sure I had enough money to eat.” Toby said. “And then she found me a job.”

“And put you right back where you'd been living,” Kyle said, laughing. “And all that time, the police were looking in the wrong places.”

“Yep. Well, I suppose we should wait on the King and Muriel,” Toby said.

“That might be a good idea, since we have the warrants. And the manpower. Mata, show our young fledgling how to make the 'Special Investigator' triangles,” Muriel said. And shortly, Toby and Domhnall were both wearing them, as well as the squads. However, Muriel noted that the squads weren't in grays. ALL of them were in the Cameron Erracht tartan kilts and tan shirts with the sleeves rolled up. And Balmoral, with oak leaves on a twig behind the badge. And Toby was wearing his Balmoral with Muriel's feathers. Muriel smiled, and donned kilts and Balmoral, herself. Taylor just laughed and switched to formal wear and the crown.

“I don't know that I'm going to need to make a formal appearance. I've been here . . . what . . . twice? Three times? And this is apt to make a splash,” Taylor said.

“Especially since I called out the media for this,” Muriel said. “We know where the developer, the pastor, and all the other contacts are. We'll go with you for the paster and developer. They're meeting in the pastor's office, this time.”

“Kyle,” Toby said, “Triangles. You're going with us. You're my deputy.”

“Approved,” Muriel said. “Guess what, Kyle. You're back to being a cop.”

“Is there transportation for them?” asked Toby.

“Yes,” Mata said. “The Commissioner Ferguson sent two cars.”

“Hmm. Small office. We go in through the sanctuary,” Toby said. “That lightning crack should echo nicely in that barn,” he added, grinning. “Warn your shields for loud noises.” And they translated.

And in the church, there was a loud crack that could be heard all over the block, and more. Toby and Kyle led the procession, followed by Taylor and Muriel and the two sets of four squads – Muriel's and Toby's. The two conspirators poked their heads out of the office at the sound, and Toby pulled them out with shields, immediately. Then dropped the shields.

“Reverend Rogers, Mister Young, you are under arrest for conspiracy to commit fraud with regard to the building codes of this city, as well as numerous charges of fraud, bribery, and tax evasion. You will be transported to the courts for formal charges following your booking at the main office of the local police,” Toby said.

“You have no authority here,” Young said.

“Shut up, you fool! They've got the KING with them,” Rogers said.

“Oh, bag it, you incompetent fop! You got me into this mess,” the developer said, and reached inside his suit coat.

“Oh, yes, please. DRAW your gun. This should be interesting,” Toby said.

“Och! And he canno,” came a thick highland brogue, and Domhnall walked around Taylor and Muriel to Toby's side. “The wee piece o' offal hasna got it, more.” And, indeed, Young was searching ineffectively for what was no longer there, but dangling from one beefy finger of the security chief by its trigger guard. Toby just looked at the Envoy and raised an eyebrow. “Well,” Domhnall said, “it seemed like a good idea at the time.” And Toby laughed.

“Come along, gentlemen, your carriage awaits,” Toby said, smiling.

“You won't get away with this, you know,” Rogers said. “We have powerful friends.”

“Oh, we know about your powerful friends. You'll have a chance to talk with them, shortly. They should be in the adjoining cells,” Toby said. “We didn't want you to feel lonesome.” And he and Kyle led the parade back between Taylor and Muriel, and the two groups of squads up the aisle to the church doors.

Outside the doors was the usual bedlam that one would expect of the media, though a BIT more subdued than their cohorts in America. Cries of 'Your Majesty!' and 'Madam Ambassador!', and 'Who's that?' greeted them. And Toby's squads split off and created a

corridor of beefy looking Scots with arms like tree trunks folded across their chest facing the divided reporters. Even the women in the squads looked like they ate whole cows for a light lunch. They were NOT people that the reporters wanted to cross.

At the car, Toby was saluted by the officer, which caused him to grin at the irony of the man saluting one that had so recently been something of a fugitive. "I'll let you do the honors of securing them as you see fit," Toby said. "Oh, and my security officer has the gun that Mister Young had been wearing in a shoulder holster."

"SIR! Yes sir!" the officer said, and cuffed the two and placed them in the back seats of the cars, separately. Then collected the gun and the copies of the warrants, and the two cars sped off. Toby turned around and stepped forward, allowing the massed squads to form up behind the principals.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "my name is Toby and I'm the Ambassador from Home to the people of Scotland. This, and a number of other actions around the city, has been taken with the assistance of His Majesty and Ambassador Muriel in an effort to curb the abuse of the poor and elderly of this city. It came to my attention that properties that the church owned were falling into disrepair to the point where they were no longer habitable. The minister of this church refused to do anything about improving the properties, and an investigation of various financial records indicated that this was an ongoing scheme in which a great many people profited at the expense of the poor. Warrants for the arrest of the individuals involved have been activated, and the properties will be managed by Home, at least for the time being."

"Your Majesty! Did you authorize this action?" asked one reporter.

"I didn't need to. Scotland and Edinburgh have enough laws to handle it. I merely supplied some support," Taylor said.

"Madam Ambassador, how is it that an Ambassador is arresting people?" shouted another.

"Ambassadors of Home are authorized, under the Treaty of Home, to take action as Special Investigators for the host country where there is a clear violation of the rights of the people," Muriel said. "This includes the authority to arrest in certain circumstances, though usually we work behind the scenes, investigating and supplying intelligence information to national authorities. This, however, was an action taken at the request of Ambassador Toby due to his long affiliation with the people of the area and their plight."

"Your Majesty, is this an official visit?" cried another.

"Not at all," Taylor said. "I had planned on coming up, later this month, but the planning hadn't been formulated, much less finished. No, this was simply a opportunity to assist a new Ambassador and the people of Scotland. As you may know, my consort, Ambassador Muriel, has already presented her credentials to your Parliament, and found them to be welcoming and interested in her assistance. I expect that in the next couple of weeks I will be able to

make my formal presentation to your Parliament with a view to our better working together.”

“Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. We have some other things that we need to go over, so if you don't mind, we'll leave, now,” Toby said, and they all translated back to the Scottish Enclave, laughing.

“Oh, GAD!” Muriel said, “where DID you learn to spout such pompous bull?”

“Everything I know I learned from the telly,” Toby said, grinning. “Isn't it the way of politicians when they get in front of a camera?”

“Well, you got THAT right,” Muriel said. “Toby, I'm turning you loose. You showed that you have a head for what's needed, and the willingness to holler for help when you need it. And your crew CERTAINLY has a flair for the dramatic. You'll do well.”

“Well, I still need lawyers, to manage things that I might not think about, like warrants,” Toby said, grinning. “But I'm getting there. What is this city going to do for building inspectors, though?”

“Leave that to the Lord Provost and Arline. Not your function,” Muriel said. “As for lawyers, try grabbing them right out of school, before they learn bad habits. Alice, my lawyer, might be able to help you make selections. Get them trained in basic Envoy techniques, then we can dump the whole set of laws of Scotland and Britain into them, and get them past the bar. That ought to lend encouragement to them to join up. And being trained tends to keep them focused on the law and the people, rather than what they can get out of it. OH! Before I forget, here's your card, drawn on one of the banks that Home owns. Your salary will be deposited directly into your account, and you can draw on it as necessary. Domhnall has more information on that for you, and will help you manage it.”

“We still need to see about getting contractors trained. Oh, and getting resource squads set up in the police,” Taylor said.

“Yea. I need to speak to the Commissioner about training his people,” Toby said. “Obviously he isn't TOO upset with us for throwing this little party.”

“Um . . . I talked to my uncle. I let him know that I was trained, and was thinking of running for Chief Constable. And he LAUGHED!” Kyle said. “He said that if I could do that, that it would show the court that I was serious about law enforcement.”

“Yep. Oh, we need to get you the law degree and police procedures for Scotland, as well as how we go about doing investigations,” Muriel said. “Thanks for the reminder. Domhnall, do you have those?”

“No, Muriel, but I can get them. I'll need to, anyway, for Toby. Might I suggest a few other courses?” he replied.

“I've got people for that,” she quipped. “Ask Betty. She'd know better than I would, and

might be able to offer other suggestions,” Muriel added. “Of course, that doesn't stop you from making suggestions to Betty. People are different. Jobs are different. So talk to her about what you need, and what Kyle will need. She can give you the basics, but she won't know about the various add-ons that you might need unless you talk to her.”

“I'll do that, then. Thanks,” Domhnall said.

“Well, if there's nothing else you need us for, why don't we get out of here and let you get back to loafing,” Muriel said, grinning at Toby.

“I'd appreciate it. I haven't had my morning nap,” he quipped back. And Taylor and Muriel translated out, laughing.

“OK, I've got a short list, and a long list,” Domhnall said. “I don't recommend giving you the whole thing at once. The short list is Scottish law, and police procedures. For Kyle, the same thing, with the addition of the procedures used by the Metropolitan police. The long list includes Enclave Administration, Accounting and Finance, and investigatory practices used by Muriel and the American Secret Service and FBI. Kyle shouldn't need the Administration or Accounting courses.”

“What can you give us that we could use immediately?” asked Toby.

“All of the short list. They're straight forward enough, though I might hold off on the Met Police procedures until later,” Domhnall said. “Those MIGHT confuse him. And he shouldn't need them unless he's serious about becoming Chief Constable.”

“OK, let's do it, then,” Toby said. “I want to get with the Commissioner as soon as possible and talk to him about training his people. I'd also like to talk about the resource squads that Muriel told me about. If we get them now, then we should be able to talk intelligently this afternoon.” So, Domhnall administered the courses to the two men.

“OK, nothing new here, really. More base in law, and things I'd forgotten about in police procedures,” Kyle said. “But pretty basic.”

“Well, I had none of it, but from what I can see it IS pretty straight forward. Now, this afternoon, I want to hit the Commissioner up for training. THAT'S going to take some double-talking. Any ideas?”

“Yea. To start with, the lack of travel time to get to a location,” Kyle said. “And the ability to do bloodless take-downs. From what I've seen, he tends to be nervous about putting his men in danger to save a civilian.”

“Good point. So, personal shields protect the men, and shields around the perpetrators can keep them contained until they can be cuffed,” Toby said. “Good! And the travel time would cut down on the need for vehicles, as well as being able to respond faster. I wonder if those would also be useful to the fire department.”

“Don’t see why not. I wonder if a shield can snuff out a fire? OH! And rescue of people inside a structure,” Kyle said.

“Let’s build a fire, outside, and see if we can put it out, or at least contain it,” Toby said. “Domhnall, do you know how to make a fire?”

“Easily, sir,” he said. “I’ll show you.” And outside, in the blank area, he created a container with a fire inside it. Toby first tried just snuffing it out. But it tended to re-ignite when the shield was removed. So, then, he tried snuffing it, and telling the shield to reduce the temperature inside to freezing. And suddenly, the fire was out and stayed out.

“That’s it, then,” Toby said, and Domhnall showed him how to make the container and set up various types of fuel in it. Even oil and gas could be put out like that. And Toby grinned. “I think we’ve got an argument for the fire department, too, then. Let’s get some lunch, then I’ll see what we can do about talking to people.”

Chapter 17

Actions Speak Louder than Words

(Monday afternoon)

They'd just finished lunch when Domhnall told them that there was a fire in a vacant building about three blocks away. Toby homed in on it, suspecting where it might be, and he and Kyle translated out. As they translated into the area, Kyle noted a suspicious person trying to escape over a fence behind the building, and froze him in a shield. Then he started looking for people inside.

Toby, on the other hand, started containing the whole building in a shield, then had a thought. Instead, he told the shield to 'grow itself' to cover every surface that wasn't human or animal, and to chill it to freezing. The fire was just being put out as the fire department and police showed up. And Kyle was kneeling on the ground checking three people that had been inside.

"Alright, what's going on here. You people didn't do a very good job. The fire's out, and there looks to be nothing more than surface damage," the officer said.

::Toby, can you handle them? The two adults will be fine until I can get to them, but the child took in a lot of smoke. I'm fighting to keep him alive, and clean out his lungs and bloodstream. Oh, suspicious character hanging on the back fence in a shield.::

::Stick with that, Kyle. I'll deal,:: Toby replied, and turned to the officer. "Now wouldn't it be rather silly, officer, for two people in distinctive clothing to stand outside someplace that they'd just set on fire? You've got a man hanging on the back fence that you might like to question."

"Don't give me that crap. NOBODY comes down in this area just to see the sights," the officer said. And suddenly there were twenty one people surrounding Kyle and Toby. Two of them went to the adults on the ground. One went to Kyle, and offered, mentally, to take over.

"Officer, I'm Toby, Ambassador from Home to the people of Scotland," Toby said, pulling out his passport and displaying it. "We were alerted to a fire at this location and, in accordance with the treaty of Home, came out to render aid." By this time, Kyle was standing up beside Toby.

"Never mind, Toby. I know this one. He's too stupid to listen. I'll just get the Commissioner," Kyle said, and suddenly Commissioner Ferguson was standing beside him. "Sorry, uncle, but we've got a boggle with this individual. We got word of a fire, and came out to render aid and put it out. He's trying high-handed tactics to intimidate us, rather than getting a report. And in the mean time, a suspect is hanging on the back fence, probably thinking up lots of excuses and alibies."

"You say you put it out?" asked Ferguson.

"Toby did, sir," Kyle replied. "I was busy trying to save the life of the boy on the ground when this . . . individual showed up and started mouthing off."

"And just how do you put out a fire?" asked Ferguson of Toby.

"Cover all the surfaces with a shield, and tell the shield to take the temperature inside down to freezing," Toby immediately replied. By then, the fire captain was standing next to him.

"Is this something special?" he asked.

"I think what you're asking is if anyone can do it," Toby said. "And yes, pretty much so. I'll admit that I'd only tried on small stuff, before this. But it worked, and I can show you how. Just one thing," he added, "you have to be trained in Envoy techniques to do it. It requires techniques only someone with the training has. And before you ask, the training is free, and doesn't take very long."

"When you're through here, I want to talk to you," the fire captain said.

"Where's your station?" asked Toby. And the fire captain told him. "OK, when we're through here, we'll drop by."

"NOW JUST A MINUTE! You're not going anyplace but jail!" the officer said.

"Ferguson, please explain to this man why he can't arrest me," Toby said, tiredly. "Or, if you prefer, I can bring in people one or two levels above you that would be happy to explain it to him. As an alternative, I could just take him to Home. But then you'd have to notify the family where to pick up his body."

"Would that really happen if you took him to Home?" asked the Commissioner.

"In his case, definitely. His soul is so dark it's black," Toby said. "I've only heard of two people that were like that that were saved. And one works in the American Enclave, and the other works for Muriel. And she saved them both. Oh, and they were Envoys. Unusual, but not unheard of. On second thought, with your permission, I'll just translate him to your office, and when we're done here I'll take you back, and release the shield on him that will be holding him in his chair."

"Johnston," Ferguson finally seemed to come to a conclusion, "I happen to know who Ambassador Toby is referring to when he says that he could bring in one or two levels above me to talk to you. And, really Toby out-ranks both of them. Now, do you really want the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament and the King of Britain to discuss with you WHY you will observe the articles of the Treaty of Home? And why this man is simply doing his job?"

"You've got to be kidding, Commissioner. I get here, and they're the only two around,

and all they're doing is watching the fire, and harassing some child!" the officer said.

"I see," Ferguson said. "Toby, maybe you're right. If you can lock him in a chair until I can get back to my office, perhaps it would be best. I really don't think we should disturb His Majesty for this." And suddenly the officer was missing.

"Now, Kyle, how's the child?" asked Toby.

"Good. One of your squad members took over and finished him up," Kyle said. "Toby, these people are HOMELESS!"

"Well, yes, of course. Why else would they have been trying to live in an vacant building?" Toby replied.

"But . . . how could they live? I mean, no utilities, no running water? Didn't they have jobs?" asked Kyle.

"Nope. First, the man lost his job because of company cutbacks, then his house and possessions because he couldn't pay the mortgage or rent or whatever. And finally, his self respect when he couldn't get another job. Now, they just live day to day, hoping that they can get enough to feed themselves," Toby said.

"But . . . that's ridiculous! People can't live like that!" Kyle said.

"But, they do, anyway, with or without your permission," Toby said, gently. "And, sometimes they die like that. Domhnall, would you have a couple of squad one take them back to the Guest House, and see that they're taken care of, please? We'll have at least one family off the street, then, and maybe we can do something with them." And Ferguson just looked at Toby in shock. "What? You're surprised that I try to find a way to take care of people? To help them? Even as 'the ghost', as you called me, that's all I was ever trying to do."

"But . . . WHY?" asked Ferguson.

"Because somebody needs to help them," Toby said, tiredly. "Look, Commissioner, Scotland has a problem. I can't believe it's only happening here. We've got people that are just trying to stay alive for one more day, and some officers that see it as their duty to harass them. We've got companies that are out of control and behaving like a new version of the Clearances, and sending jobs out of the country, so there are more and more of these people on the streets. We've got fire and emergency people that, no matter how hard they try, can't get to situations fast enough. And now, there's a way to help them. The fire companies, the emergency crews, even the police! And, there's a way to help these poor people that are starving to death or freezing to death in the winter. All it takes is training in the Envoy techniques, and they can at least take care of themselves. All it takes is training in the Envoy techniques to get fire companies to a fire before it gets so out of hand that somebody dies. All it takes is training in Envoy techniques to help YOUR people to be where they need to be to do their job. I can't force anyone to take it. They have to want to. I can show you some of

it. I can beg you to try it – get a squad trained up and see how they do. It's working in London, with the Metropolitan Police. And it can be adapted to fit the conditions, here. Ah, well, I talk too much. Kyle, bring that man out here, and we'll see what he has to say," Toby finally ran down. "I'll take the fire captain through the building and see if it's safe, and maybe see if we can find the cause of the fire."

"Sure, Toby," Kyle said. "No problem."

"Oh, and Kyle," Toby said, grinning tiredly, "you did good. You did just what was needed at the time, and left me free to handle what I could. Thank you. Now, Captain, is one of your men an inspector?"

"Yes, sir. I'll just get him, sir." And the man took off, running and hollering commands.

"Now, Ferguson, there's something I need from you – unless you want to let this suspect go because he's better at lying and knowing how to manipulate the laws of this country than you are at catching him out. I need a request from you for assistance in the investigation. Then I can have Kyle take this person back to my office, and we can meet him there. There are ways that Envoy trained people can get to the truth of the matter fairly quickly. Plus, we can tell when a person is lying," Toby said. "All I need is your request for our assistance. Under the Treaty, that gives us the authority to use our techniques."

"You can get to the truth of things?" asked Ferguson.

"Well, at least we can find out if this person was involved in starting the fire. And it's suspicious enough that it's possible that it was set. We'll find out more with the fire inspector," Toby said.

"Then, Mister Ambassador, I request your assistance," the Commissioner said, drawing himself up and being formal.

"Done, then. Kyle, take him back to the office, and be gentle with him. Take the rest of squad one and have them get him something to drink, use the facilities if he needs to, and things like that. We'll be back, shortly," Toby said. "Domhnall, squad three with me, please. We want to protect these people. And have the other squad set up a shield, like Carla did, to keep the curious from getting hurt in there."

"Sir! Yes, sir!" Domhnall said, grinning.

"Yea, I am coming on a bit strong, aren't I," Toby said, grinning. "Chalk it up to my being new at this. You know what's needed." And Toby and squad three took the fire captain, the inspector and the Commissioner into the building by flying them there at a slow speed.

Kyle grabbed the man on the back fence, and took him back to the office. The act of being frozen in a shield for so long, then translated to an almost alien environment totally unnerved the man. And then Domhnall and two squads joined Kyle, which simply made it worse for the man. And then, there was their behavior. They weren't shouting at him. They

weren't putting him in restraints. They were offering him tea and the use of a lavatory, and were concerned with his comfort. And the reality was that it did absolutely NOTHING to put the man at ease. This was not what he expected. He expected a certain amount of formality, of course, and perfunctory passes at common decency used as intimidation. But NOT real concern for his well being. And it scared the crap out of him.

After a while, Toby, the Commissioner and the fire captain translated into the office. "Is THAT how you got to the fire so quickly?" asked the captain.

"Hmm? Oh, yes. So, did you see what you wanted to see?" asked Toby.

"Yes, certainly. An oil soaked floor, a poorly built fire built too close to a wall. Purely an accident caused by circumstances and the lack of knowledge of how to do things," the captain said. "Oh, I suppose we COULD have him arrested. But really, what good would it do?"

"Well, that lets him off the hook. Unfortunate about the family, but they survived it thanks to Kyle," the Commissioner said, "so I suppose that's it. The building will have to be torn down, of course, and the council won't like that."

"Ferguson, is there any market for used building materials?" asked Toby.

"Some I suppose. I understand that there are architects and such that make use of them," the Commissioner said.

"Well, then, maybe the council and I can come to some sort of agreement. We can either disassemble the building or destroy it, depending on whether or not there's a market for such. If we destroy it, there'll be a small fee. If we can just disassemble it, even though it takes longer, we may be able to waive the fee by simply selling the materials," Toby said. "Now, should it be you or I present it to them? And what would they do with the property?"

"I don't know. Pointless to turn it into a parking lot," Ferguson said.

"Where are we?" asked the captain. "I feel that I should know this place."

"Oh, it used to be a construction site. The developer went bankrupt on it. Home bought the property, destroyed what was here, and built this Enclave," Toby said. "And, because it's owned by Home, it's off the grid, totally. You're in a whole different country, here. By the treaty, jurisdiction ends at the property line, and the only rules, here, are the ones handed down by the Leader of Home."

"Construction site. Of course. The one that's been an eyesore for so long. But it was still a construction site just a few days ago," the captain said.

"Yes. It was. Then Home bought it, and a friend of Ambassador Muriel's came out and helped us build it. It took two afternoons. She's from America, so for her it was morning. She showed me how things were built, and why they were built that way so that I'd be able to help others by fixing up flats and buildings. Or even adding on, here, if I chose to," Toby said.

“And YOU can do this? Build like this?” he asked.

“Well, maybe not as intricate and involved as this is, not without help,” Toby said. “But yes, I can put up a structure. I can set it alight, and show you how I killed the fire before it got out of hand. OH! Just a moment. Domhnall, would you see that this man is put in the care of Guest House, please? The inspector, fire captain and Commissioner all agree that it was an unfortunate combination of events, and are not charging him. He'll need a place to stay, and maybe some training for a job so he can get back into society. Thank you.”

“Who, actually, is in charge, here?” asked the fire captain.

“Now, that's a GOOD question,” Toby said, smiling. “Basically, I am. But the Envoys will often make suggestions, sometimes even ones counter to what I think should be done. They also often go ahead and do things that need to be done without prompting, simply because they know they need to be done, and I might not think of them. They are limited in some respects, though that's changing, too, from what I understand. They can't judge. Literally. The ability to understand when an action harms another person is built into humans, but Envoys don't have that. Or at least not in the same way. They CAN'T harm another, willfully, without direct orders. They also aren't creative like we are. Their society was essentially static until they started teaching humans the Envoy techniques. Then the humans started teaching THEM their own techniques in new ways. They ARE far more intelligent than we are, for a number of reasons, but in other ways they're only about as advanced as a teenager. Or maybe not that far.”

“And, you know this, how?” the captain asked.

“Oh, they've kept a record of the changes and how they came about,” Toby said. “Much of it was done by Ambassador Muriel. Some by her friends and by others, because of circumstances they found themselves in. Police, for example. Or the sorts of stuff the Rescue and Recovery unit does. Well, this isn't getting you the demonstration I promised you,” he added. “Let's go outside, and I'll show you how to put out a fire.”

Chapter 18

The Way it Works

(Monday afternoon, later)

“OK, here's how it works,” Toby said, as they got outside. “OH! Commissioner, did you want to see, too?”

“I'd like to, if you don't mind,” he replied.

“Of course I don't mind. What I'm going to do,” Toby went on, “is to actually build a structure, but not a full sized building. You know, come to think of it, you're not really going to know what I'm doing from my telling you. There is another way that Muriel told me about, but it requires your permission. What I'd have to do is establish a one way link – from me to you, only – that would allow you to actually see what I'm doing. And to do that without it hurting you, I need to establish a power link to you to support the effort. But it's up to you.”

“Why not two way?” asked the fire captain.

“Because I don't want you to even think that I'm trying to read your mind,” Toby said. “The sort of thing that most people think of when they think of a mental link is that I'd be able to see all your deep, dark secrets. One of the things that Muriel showed me was what it's actually like when she had to do that. Nasty. And she only did it under duress – because she needed to gather information quickly from someone who was just plain lying to her. NOT interested. Nor am I interested in controlling you or anything like that. She's done this trick of a one way link with a US Senator that was suspicious of what was going on. She was successful, but it about blew the man's circuits realizing all she goes through in an emergency. This would be nowhere near as hectic as that, but it would give you an in-depth look at how we do some things.”

“Actually,” the fire captain said, “I think I'd prefer a two way link. You're saying that it's just for communication? That it doesn't go deeper?”

“Yes, of course,” Toby said. “Even the deep link that I have with Domhnall Dubh is mostly a communication link. It's just that it goes into being able to read what the other needs at a particular time. And I'm still getting used to it. Envoys CAN'T judge, and they have nothing to hide, so it works well with them. I haven't tried it with a human, and probably won't for years.”

“Then I'd definitely like to try that,” the captain said.

“Um . . . if it wouldn't be too much of a bother,” Ferguson said, “I think I'd like to try that, too.”

“Really! Well, then, give me a second to get it set up, then we can continue,” Toby said, and established the power link, then made the mental connection with them. It was a

forced connection, but he opened it up for two-way communication.

::Now. The way it works is that I take power from the universe and turn it into shields. And from that into matter. There actually is a direct link between energy – what we call power – and matter,:: Toby sent, laying down a shield pad to build on. ::So, let me imagine a structure,:: and a building slowly seemed to ghost into view on the pad – a shed-like structure made of wood, with glass windows and a metal roof. Then, when it solidified, he had them test it, to see that it was actually material, and no longer shields.

“Ow!” Ferguson said. ::Splinter,:: was what his mind sent. Toby went to him and removed the splinter, then repaired the tissue and removed the pain. ::You're a doctor?::

::Nope. Battlefield first aid. It only does wounds and the like. Not diseases,:: Toby said, then felt a mind nudge his. ::Yes?:: he said, opening up to it.

::That was neatly done,:: a woman said, and Toby looked up to see an African American woman in a white uniform. ::Hi,:: she broadcast. ::I'm Fran, and I'm the doctor for the American Enclave. I'd stopped by to set up a squad of Envoy doctors until Muriel can find a human to take over your clinic. They're good, and they'll stay on as your doctor's assistants once he or she is found. You have GOT to be Toby.::

::I am. Hello Fran. Glad to meet you. I was just about to give a demonstration of how I managed to put out a fire,:: Toby sent.

::Then hold on. Muriel would like to see this. And I know someone else that would like to meet your charge. His rescue was well done for not having been trained for it,:: Fran said. ::I'm almost wondering if he'd like to become a doctor, himself. But I think Marcia's got her eye on his being the first of the Scottish Rescue and Recovery unit. And two more women showed up. Muriel, of course. But the other was in a red tunic, and Toby presumed that this was the mysterious Marcia.

::Well met, Toby. This is Marcia, and she'd like to talk to Kyle, if you don't mind,:: Muriel sent.

::That's up to him, not me. Kyle has a mission in mind, but I'm sure he'd like whatever information he can get,:: Toby grinned. And the fire captain and Commissioner just gawked at the three self-assured women.

Marcia just smiled and sent, ::I'd like to see the demonstration, first, though. I think you've come up with something new. Obvious, after the fact, but I'd like to see how YOU do it.::

::Feel free. I was just about to set the fire, and let it catch well, then show them how I put it out. I've got links to them, so they'll know what I did and how I did it. You can mesh in with me,:: Toby said, and felt three light touches mesh in with him. Then he constructed a typical poverty level 'rubbish' fire, and lit it.

It took a minute to take hold, and start climbing the wall and spreading out on the floor, but suddenly it seemed to explode through the building. Toby quickly created a shield and told it to surround the building, then cover all the surfaces and chill them down. And just as suddenly, the fire was out. Only residual smoke that was already in the air escaped.

::And that's how it's done. And now I'll unplug you both, and we can go back to talking,:: Toby said, and did as he had said.

"O-K," Marcia said, "I see what you did. And we can use that. VERY neatly done. You've caught onto the fact that shields are semi-intelligent, and can be given a task. You could definitely save structures this way. And as for saving people, well, that's obvious. Thanks, Toby."

"Yep. I'd say that that one should be spread around. Mata's got it, and is passing it to my squads. Do your squads know how to do that?" asked Muriel.

"I honestly don't know. I know Domhnall is deep in me, and probably saw what I did. Either at the fire, or here at the demonstration. Domhnall?" Toby asked.

"We got it. We saw it the first time, but didn't realize how important it was. We STUDIED it this second time. We can do it," Domhnall replied. "And so can all the Envoys in your Enclave, Toby."

"Good!" Toby said, "Then you don't need me."

"WHAT! Wait! Don't you DARE leave us alone," Domhnall said. "We can't run this place alone! We wouldn't know what to do!" And Muriel, Fran and Marcia laughed.

"OK," Muriel said. "I can see that you're as wicked as I am." And Domhnall just growled.

"Toby, I'd like to have your diplomatic squad trained as doctors, too, if you don't mind. It's something that we're starting to initiate across all the Enclaves," Fran said. "You don't need it here, but you might run into things in the field where they'd be necessary."

"OH! Hmm, yes. I can see what you mean. Yea," Toby said, "If they're willing, then I don't see any reason why not."

"And I'd like to teach your attack dogs the Rescue and Recovery techniques," Marcia said. "What Kyle did was spur of the moment, and driven by necessity. That's not a put-down. He did very well, and I'm impressed. But you might have times when you need a more structured approach. Oh, I'll give it to Kyle, too. As a cop, he might need it. And yes, Muriel told me about his intentions. And I think it's great."

"OK, well Kyle is still in my office, I think. Feel free to ask him," Toby said. "I can't speak for him. He has to make his own decisions."

"I'll do that, then," Marcia said, and walked into the building.

"How are you two doing," Fran said to the captain and Ferguson. "That last bit of the demonstration was a bit fast. Did Toby over-blow the power he was feeding you?"

"Not that I can see. No pain. It WAS a bit intense at the end. A lot happening all at once. But I see what he did. I just wish I could do that. Or better still, my men," the fire captain said.

"No reason why not," Toby said. "All it takes is the basic Envoy training, and a few additions. And it's free. You just need a couple of days to take it."

"And anyone can take it?" the Commissioner asked.

"Well, it's not recommended for those that have a power complex or a lot of dirty secrets," Muriel said. "But both of you should be able to do it."

"And we DO understand emergencies," Toby said. "It doesn't all have to be done at once. Only the first part of it, to get you into a personal shield. After that, we can spread it out over time, to suit your needs. Would you like me to take you back to your offices to think about it?"

"Um . . . well . . .," the Commissioner said.

"Oh, come on Ewan. You know you want to," the captain said. "Quit dithering, man. You'd simply waste this man's time coming back again and again. This is REAL, man!"

"It's simple for you, Gordy. Always has been. You've been taking risks all your life," Ewan Ferguson said. "I'm not like you."

"You are, you know. You just have to get your nerve up. Think what it would be like to take on armed men without a weapon of your own, because you KNOW you couldn't be hurt by them," Gordy said. "I wasn't made fire captain because I was fearless, but because I worked to overcome my fear by learning all I could about my opponent. Well, my opponent is fire. Yours, though, is yourself. And until you face yourself and make decisions to overcome that opponent, you'll never get further."

"Gordy . . .," Ewan started. And stopped. Kyle had come out and was watching him.

"Uncle Ewan, you pushed me into being a cop. And I was scared. And I ended up making a mistake because of it," Kyle said. "A bad mistake. I'd made others, and you'd tried to cover for me. But this time, you couldn't. And I thought my life had ended – that I'd never be anything again. Well, I happen to know that you got pushed into being Commissioner simply because the party had no one else, and the businesses thought they could control you and make you their private security force. So, how about BEING a cop, instead." And Kyle grew, some. "You're a man, just like me. You're a man, but your soul wants to fly," he said, and went into full display, then did what Muriel and others hadn't realized HOW to do. He let

his soul control the wings, and jumped into the air. The wings beat, and he flew. Then, he glided, banked, and came back toward his uncle, landing a few feet away, but walking toward him. As he walked, he resumed his normal size and appearance, and reached his uncle just in time to catch him before he fell over.

Ewan Ferguson was in full connection shock, and Kyle simply laid him on a pad, and talked to him. And, it took a moment for Fran to realize that the fire captain was also in connection shock, but hadn't fallen over yet – like he was fighting it. So, she went to him.

“Let it happen, sir. It won't hurt you. It can't. It's part of you,” Fran said, then continued on into the litany. It took five minutes to get them both through the shock, and finally seated in Toby's office. Meantime, Toby had removed the demonstration building, and made sure that those not actively working with the two shock-bound men were comfortable and had something to drink. But finally, it was over.

“THAT was a NASTY TRICK, young man,” Ewan grumbled.

“Yep. Probably as nasty as making me a cop. But there's a difference. I didn't WANT to be a cop,” Kyle said. “And you DID want to be trained. You never could hide from me, Uncle Ewan. And now you know WHY I can grow wings. You can do the same, once you've got a little training in how to control yourself.”

“It was still a nasty trick, even if I DID want to be trained,” Ewan said.

“Yep. Now, are you hurt by it?” asked Kyle?

“No,” Ewan finally said.

“Something Toby told me, once I was trained. Check what you do against your balance. I did. It went toward the good,” Kyle said. “I KNEW that it would help you and not hurt you. So, you might as well stop the bluster and start learning. Toby,” he suddenly re-directed, “Can I borrow one of your squad members?”

“Nope. You can't,” said a voice from the doorway. “Kyle Ferguson, you deserve a squad of your own. You've got balls, boy. The rescue, saving that little boy, then finally standing up to your uncle. You've got us.”

“Wait a minute! You two work for the Guest House,” Kyle said.

“Not no more. And no, the manager wasn't unhappy. In fact, he suggested it,” the Envoy said. “So we recruited four more from home, and the Manager put us all in a suite for you. So, shut up and start training your uncle. We'll monitor and help, if you need it. I don't think you'll need much. So, get cracking, boy, and let's see what you're made of.”

“Uh, huh. I see where this is going,” Muriel said. “But I need to get out of here or Taylor will be upset. Unless it's an emergency, we ALWAYS have dinner together. You two ought to be able to get these men through the basics in time for their dinner. And you can

cover the rest tomorrow.” And she translated out.

“Lunch, for me,” Fran said. “The only thing I wish is that I could have seen Toby's display. Muriel said that it's spectacular.”

“Well, I think I can take a minute to walk you outside,” Toby said. And Fran got her wish, as soon as they were outside.

“Kyle, you've got the information on the Rescue and Recovery techniques. You don't HAVE to do what we did, and push your body that hard,” Marcia said. “Whether or not you decide to create your own Rescue and Recovery unit is up to you. But that should help you do what you want to do. Good luck.” and she translated out.

And that just left Kyle, Toby, and the two new trainees. And sure enough, by six o'clock they were both trained, and Gordy had regular uniform and 'turnouts' made of shields and impervious to everything. Ewan discovered that he LIKED playing with shields. And the new doctors unit in the Scottish Enclave checked the two men over to be sure they were fit. Except for minor things, they passed easily, and the minor things were corrected without their even knowing about it.

Chapter 19

Presentation (Tuesday morning)

“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for allowing me to come here, today,” Toby said. “As I KNOW you are aware, The Leader of Home and Ambassador to earth presented her credentials here a while back. I understand that she was a bit . . . um . . . flamboyant.” Which brought several chuckles from the Parliament members. “She could afford to be. She doesn't normally work here and live with you people. I do. And though she's always ready to jump in and help, she's asked me to be the man on the scene and handle the everyday things.”

“I also know that she told you some of the things that people trained in Envoy techniques can do,” he added. “I don't see the need to repeat her advertisement.” And that brought more chuckles and an outright laugh from behind him. “No, I'm simply here to tell you that Scotland now has its own Envoy Enclave, though it's still a work in progress. The basics are in, and we've already been active in both helping the area and training people. You are all welcome to come out and visit. See what we have, and suggest ways that we can help the people of Scotland.”

“On a side note,” he went on, “it looks like both police and fire will soon be more responsive. Members of both are being trained in Envoy techniques – the basics AND those specific to their jobs. Eventually, we hope to cover all of Scotland with such help. One of the basics to the training is what Muriel calls a 'battlefield first aid' course that has already saved the life of one young Scot caught in a fire. He and his parents are now in the Enclave Guest House, recovering from the loss of their home and possessions, and trying to determine where they will go from here. And they're being aided by Envoys in making their selections.”

“I won't take up more of your time. Your Presiding Officer has my card, and can make duplicates for each of you, as you request. Contact my office and you'll have instant transportation to the Enclave, and be able to see what all we do and ask any questions that you have,” Toby added. Then concluded with, “Thank you, again, for allowing me to speak here, today.” And he promptly translated out, which caused gasps from the Members of the Scottish Parliament.

“What Ambassador Toby didn't tell you is that, until recently, he was living on the street, taking whatever jobs he could get and STILL trying to help people in the area where he lived,” Arline said. “One of those jobs was to keep me informed of the plight of the poor and homeless in this city. I can only presume that this goes on in other cities, too. I have laid possible legislation before you countless times in the last two years in an effort to alleviate it. So far, most of it has been rejected by you because you felt it would be too expensive. And instead, you wanted things passed that were even MORE expensive and only helped the rich or the businesses.”

“Ladies and gentlemen, that stops now. The next person to try to promote such a bill

will be thoroughly investigated by His Majesty, Taylor the First. And believe me, that will be a thorough investigation, including all your financial information, your contacts, your emails, and everything about you. And it won't stop with just you. Your contacts will also be examined in detail. The corruption stops now, or the arrests begin," she said. "And that, ladies and gentlemen, is a direct quote from His Majesty. Now, as to how the investigations will occur, you should know by now that, as part of the Treaty of Home, several countries in the world have sanctioned Ambassadors as being Special Investigators, to act on behalf of the country in eliminating such behavior in politics, business, religion, and the media. You people ratified that Treaty, though your ratification or lack of it would not have affected its implementation. It is the law of the land, people. So, clean up your act."

"I have three bills, here, that I'm handing back to you. If you can't see why, then see me in my office and we'll discuss it. People, I don't ever want to see another bill that gives preferential treatment to a business, religion or media while we have poor people dying on the streets from starvation or being frozen to death. And since these three bills were all that was on the agenda for today, this session is adjourned," she finished, and translated out. And that DID shock the MSPs. They hadn't realized that she was trained.

Then came the final shock. A bell rang, and a figure stood in the center of the arc of chairs. "Well," he said. "I see Arline has managed to shake you up some. In case you don't know who I am, my name is Taylor. Yep. THAT Taylor. One-time prince of the realm that taught two thousand men and women to ride ghost horses and wear what some called ridiculous green uniforms. Guess what? I grew up. My grandmother abdicated in my favor, and the majority of the population supported me. So, now I have a dirty job to do. Being King."

"I've watched for years," Taylor said, "as people were bled of their life savings because of the behavior of businesses. I've seen families thrown out on the streets, their homes repossessed because they could no longer make the mortgage payments. And I wondered what could be done about it. Well, the answer was simple. The majority of the British Parliament was arrested for their corruption. Then the businesses that had been feeding their greed were thrown out of the country and their officers arrested. Then I took on the banks. Believe, people."

"I've met with Arline several times, informally. Yesterday I met with her, formally, and presented my credentials. Here are copies of them, if you care to peruse them," Taylor said, showing them to the people, then laying them on Arlene's desk. "In addition, I suggest that you look into the actions that Ambassador Muriel has engaged in over the course of nine years as the Leader of Home. You saw her as flamboyant. What you don't know is that she is also capable of going for the throat. She's had to deal with such corruption as you people have enjoyed. She well knows how to see it end, and has no problem having the rich and powerful arrested. So, if you like your jobs, I suggest that you clean up your act, immediately. If you DON'T like your jobs, then you shouldn't be here, and I suggest that you resign. Because, if this continues, the arrests WILL start. My own analysis team has collected enough evidence on some of you people to get warrants based on probable cause. The arrests will start next Monday if I don't see a difference in this body before then," he concluded, and translated back out.

“WHAT IS THIS?” one MSP said. “Are we to be spoken to like naughty children?”

“Oh, shut up, dick,” another said. “You’ve been pushing this trash for years, and it’s been rejected each time. Now we know why. Which companies own you? Huh? Who’s money are you taking. I suggest that you take a long vacation in a country with no extradition agreement with Britain or Scotland. And when I say long, I mean like for the rest of your miserable life.”

“You can’t talk to me like that!” the first said. “I’m the head of the party you belong to.”

“That can be remedied,” said the second. “Personally, I hope you stick around and try that trick again. It would be worth it to watch you being arrested right out of a session. He’s done it before, you know. And so has Ambassador Muriel. They only respect one thing – honesty. You’re through, old man. Go tell that to the company that keeps you around as a pet.”

And, in an office in a pale blue Enclave, three people sat in a casual area sipping tea. “You did a nice job of warming them up, Toby. You told them the advantages of Envoy training, and how it’s already helping people,” Arline said. “And you did it with humor, and very understated. After Muriel, that had to be refreshing for them. I’m afraid what I had to say to them may cost me my position. But you know? I don’t care. Because, if they choose to reject what I said and try to do the same things without me, I’d simply be voted back in within six months.”

“Oh, I don’t think it will come to that, Arline,” Taylor said. “I rather gave them what-for, myself, and they’ve got until Monday to show improvement or the arrests start. I wasn’t fooling. My analysis team DOES have enough for probable cause on them. What I didn’t say is that Muriel’s ‘Special Investigators’ have enough to make the arrests stick. Without bail, if I understand Alice correctly.”

“You’re saying that you could gut the Scottish Parliament?” asked Arline?

“No, there aren’t that many in your Parliament that are dirty,” Taylor said. “You know they’ll call for your head.”

“I expected that,” Arline said. “But like you and Muriel say, how can they hold me? All I have to do is reach this Enclave and ask for asylum, and they can’t get to me.”

“They’ll try,” Toby said. “They won’t succeed, but they’ll try. And be arrested for it.”

“I’m just afraid that Kyle’s uncle might end up involved in it,” Taylor said.

“There’s a watch on him,” Domhnall said.

“WHAT?” hollered Toby.

"My doing, Toby," Kyle said. "Uncle Ewan is weak. I know it. Hell, HE knows it. And when you pulled this public stunt, I contacted him and told him to come in. He wouldn't. One of my squad is watching him. We'll know where he goes, who he sees, and what he's asked to do as soon as HE does."

And Taylor started laughing. "Oh, that's rich. We get to take down one of the ones that's directing this on charges of attempting to 'influence' a police commissioner. THAT ought to make people sit up and take notice."

"It's also possible that he'll tell them 'no'. He's discovered the joy of shields," Kyle said. "He knows he can't be hurt unless he lowers it."

"You think he'll grow a pair after just a few hours of being trained?" asked Toby.

"Maybe. It IS a possibility, though I'll admit that it isn't a high probability," Kyle said, smiling. "I think they'll threaten his family."

"So, how many people do we need to protect?" asked Taylor.

"And how can we reach them all in time?" asked Arline.

"Here you go, take my hand," said Kyle. "You just reached his family. I'm his only living relative. He never had kids. His wife is dead. And my parents were killed in a motor accident years ago. Uncle Ewan has been raising me since then. And I don't need protection. THEY might. But not me." And Taylor started laughing all over again.

"So, what are you going to do?" asked Toby.

"Become a target," Kyle said. "Have you SEEN some of the things that Muriel did? My security chief that used to be my butler showed me, last night. That girl was CRAZY! But she was right. Taylor, you know some of them. Who else could have done the stunts that she did?"

"You're not her," Taylor said. "And I know for fact that she didn't do them alone. She either had her twelve friends available, or all four of her squads."

"Except when she saved a previous and present President of the United States from criminals," Kyle said. "I've got my shield set just the way she said. Go deep and say 'hi'. Then ask it to protect you from anything that could harm you. I could walk through fire and not even smell smoke. Arline, I think you should stay here for a bit. Say, until after Monday." And Arline started laughing. "Really. They won't stop at just one attempt."

"OK, I'll accept the invitation. Ask the manager to set me up with a room. Oh, what about Ralph?" she asked.

"Already upstairs, waiting for you," Kyle said, smiling. "And, if all else fails, I can always call Marcia. Her team is made up of some of Muriel's friends. And all seven of them

have a security squad and security chief. They just don't believe in stopping in a hostage situation. And there's never any injuries."

"Oh, my. You HAVE been busy," Taylor said.

"Just doing my job. That's one heck of a team my squad turned out to be," Kyle said. "I've still got to work out my 'signature move' though."

"Well, don't think too hard," Taylor said. "Sometimes they just come to you."

"Yea, I guess so. Anyway," Kyle said. "We'll have to wait for them to make their move."

"Toby said your wings are a Red Kite? What's that?" asked Taylor.

"Oh, wait a second. I'll see if I can find a picture," Toby said, pulled out his tablet. Suddenly, the air was split with a loud 'SCREE' that seemed to rise up.

"What was that?" asked Kyle.

"An accident. I saw red, and hit the wrong link. Just a second . . ." and Kyle cut Toby off.

"Play that again!" he demanded. And Toby did.

"It's just a Red Tailed Hawk. They're the only ones that seem to do that," Toby said. And Kyle grinned.

"That's WICKED!," he said.

"Anyway, this is what a Red Kite looks like," Toby said, finding the right picture.

"Pretty bird. Delicate, but aggressive look to it. NICE tail," Taylor said.

"TAYLOR! Is that all you can say?" asked Arline. "The man just found his signature, for crying out loud!"

"The color's nice, too," Taylor replied. And Kyle laughed. And Arline growled.

"Really, Arline," Kyle said. "It's no big thing. Just a sound. I may have to play with it a bit, though. Make it more piercing, or maybe an echo effect, or something."

"Toby, there's someone coming. Fast," Arline said.

"Yea, so I see," Toby said. "It's Eddie the snitch. I have a hunch what this might be. And earlier than I expected."

"I'm coming, too," Kyle said. "You might need help."

“Yea. Once I find out what Eddie's got to say, take him to the office,” Toby said. ::Domhnall, let them in but keep them contained. Like a sleeve. And close off both ends when the last is in. And see if you can get someone to build a prison for us, please? I think we'll need it.::

::On it, sir.::

::No windows, no doors. Light and airy inside, but obvious that the only way they'll get out is when we let them out,:: Toby said.

::Sounds good to me, sir. They'll get almighty tired of blue marble, though,:: Domhnall said.

::Yea,:: Toby said. ::See if you can get the pattern for it. Before this is over, we may have to stack them up.::

::Got it, sir.::

“Eddie, what's the problem?” Toby asked.

“GEEZ! Mister Toby, they're coming. A whole army of them. They says they're gonna level this place. Hey! I thought this was a construction site! And how come all of a sudden you're all duded out?”

“Later, Eddie. Go with Kyle. It's all right. You'll be protected. Kyle, you can rearrange the seats to let everybody watch. I'll try to pipe the sound to you. And feed this ravining beast, but not too much, or he'll just throw it up,” Toby said.

“OK. Holler if you need me,” Kyle said.

“Yea, right. It's only an army, Kyle,” Toby said. “Actually, I feel sorry for them.”

Kyle laughed. “You would.” And he took Eddie to the office. Toby just stood there and waited.

Chapter 20

Presentation Aftermath

(Tuesday morning and afternoon)

They came piling through the walk-in archway in the curtain wall like rats escaping from a sewer fire. Unlike rats, though, they didn't separate and spread out. Partly, it was because of the shield 'sleeve', and partly because they saw their target ahead of them. They were stopped by another shield in front of them, about ten feet from Toby. And they were armed. There were about fifty of them carrying 'assault rifles' – AK-47s, AR-15s, a couple had Uzi's. And they were the most disreputable, rag-tag army you could never hope to see EXCEPT for their firearms.

"Gentlemen," Toby said. "This is the Scottish Envoy Enclave – an Embassy of Home. And you've managed to break the only law that Home has ever seen fit to make. You've broken the peace of Home. Lay down your weapons. They're useless, here."

"Yea, well we'll just see how useless they are, won't we," the leader said, lifting the gun and pulling the trigger. And nothing happened. Others tried moving the charging handle to load a cartridge into the chamber, and again nothing happened. The moving parts of the gun were now unmoving parts.

"Put them down, people," Toby said. "You've had enough fun with your toys. Domhnall Dubh," he said, louder, "would you please bring the squads to escort these desperados to their new homes?" And twenty one huge, kilted, barbaric looking men filed out of the office, grinning wickedly.

"Wait a minute, there ain't any doors, there!" the leader said.

"Ah, well, laddie, we'll just put you in there by process of osmosis. We'll just apply enough pressure on this side of the stone wall so that you naturally ooze through to the other side. O' course, you may not be in the same shape you started out in, but that's no never mind to us," Domhnall said. And that's when the screaming started, like some little girls startled by a spider.

And Toby watched as the men were dragged out of the 'sleeve', disarmed, and walked toward the building. At the last minute, they were translated inside, and it looked for all the world like they'd been pressed through the wall. Incontinence seemed to be prevalent among those following the leader of this 'brave band of rebels'. And shortly, the last passed 'through' the wall to be met by shining Envoy figures – with wings. Fortunately, Toby didn't hear about that until later, when he was sitting down, so he wouldn't fall over, laughing.

"Talk about cruel and unusual punishment," Arline said. "And not a mark on them. Think you'll get any information from them?"

"Them? No. Too low on the organizational chart. I'd almost bet that someone hired

one or two of the roving gangs, and gave them these bright, shiny rifles, and pointed them toward us with the promise of lots of money,” Toby said. “We might get identification from them when they’re stripped and given their prison costumes. But I doubt it. When this ‘time of troubles’ is over, I’ll turn them over to Ferguson and have them charged with the attempted violation of the Treaty. That will at least give them a warm place to stay and nourishing meals for a while.”

“Well, I ought to get out of here and see what Muriel’s up to, before she gets up to it,” Taylor said. “This WAS fun, though. Keep me advised as to what happens, will you?”

“Of course, Taylor. It’s the least one should do for one’s monarch,” Toby said, and watched Eddie’s eyes get larger. And Taylor translated out.

“Yea, I’d probably better make sure that Ralph isn’t frantic,” Arline said. “And call Craig and tell him that I won’t be back to the office or chairing Parliament until after Monday. ‘For my health’.” And that caused Toby to outright laugh. And Eddie’s eyes got even bigger.

When Arline had left, Eddie looked at Toby and said, “Wot have you gotten yourself into? They CAN’T be who I think they are!”

“Sure they can. I’ve known Arline for a couple of years, now. Ever since Kyle’s uncle started chasing me all over Edinburgh,” Toby said. “She put me in contact with someone that could actually hire me – a lady that happens to be the consort to the King. So, obviously, I got to meet him, too.”

“You said you was gonna tell me why this ain’t a construction site any more,” Eddie said.

“Yep. Well, Muriel – that’s Ambassador Muriel, the Leader of Home – gave me a job. And a place to work and live. This place,” Toby said.

“Yea, but you used to stay here, before,” Eddie said.

“Yep. It just happened to be held by the City, and they couldn’t get rid of it. So Home bought it, and Muriel brought in one of her friends, and she taught me how to build. It took two days,” Toby said.

“Must be nice to have friends like that,” Eddie said.

“Well, actually, it took me a bit to get used to calling them by name, like that,” Toby said. “They’re supposedly powerful people, but they’re actually more like just everyday people. They don’t put on airs, or anything like that. And they’re fun to be around.”

“GEEZ! You really fell in it, din you?” Eddie said.

“Yea, I guess. Of course, it IS work, too. We went out, yesterday, to a fire, then came back here and trained a couple of people. This morning, I had to present my credentials to

Parliament, and explain what we do, here. Look, Eddie,” Toby said, “I can't guarantee your safety out on the street. Why don't you stay here for a while until things settle down?”

“What? Here? I couldn't afford this place?” Eddie said.

“You can if you're my guest,” Toby said. “That's room, food, clothes, people to wait on you. All sorts of things. And it would keep you out of the line of fire. Come on, I'll set it up for you.”

“GEEZ! You somebody special or something?” asked Eddie. “How do you get to just tell people to let me stay here for free?”

“Like I said, Eddie, this was built for me,” Toby said. “I'm the boss, here. I'm the Ambassador from Home to the people of Scotland. The whole thing is being run by Envoys, but it's being run to support me and what I do.”

“So, what do you do?” asked Eddie.

“Talk to people. Try to get them to understand what Envoys are and what the training is. Try to help people like you and Elizabet and the others. Try to get the rich and powerful to understand that we're people, too,” Toby said. “So, you see, not really much different from what I was doing when I was living on the street. Here's the manager of Guest House. Got a guest for you,” he said to the manager. “Friend of mine that risked everything to come warn me about those nasty people that were here a few minutes ago.”

“No problem, sir. Single room, with servants, of course. They'll let him know about everything,” the manager said. “We'll take good care of him.” And two other Envoys showed up to escort Eddie to his new room.

“Thanks,” Toby said.

“Our job, sir. And he looks like he needs a lot of help. Maybe my people can do something for him,” the manager said. “Looks like he's been so far down that he no longer knows about up.”

“Yea. There's a lot of them like that. Some I could reach and help, even if I didn't have much, myself. Others were like that band that came through here and are now residing in our jail,” Toby said.

“Firearms, no less,” the manager said.

“Yea. You know, they have to have serial numbers on them. I wonder if we can trace them back to who bought them,” Toby said. “Thanks for the hint,” he added, grinning. And waived and went back to his office.

“Already looking,” Domhnall said, grinning. “So far, nothing. We're starting at both ends, where we can. Technically, these shouldn't even be in the country. Civilians aren't

allowed such weapons. So, we're trying military possibilities as well as trying to get the records from the manufacturers."

"Then I'll leave you to it," Toby said, smiling back.

"Oh, and Kyle left to help his uncle. Apparently, he got hit at the same time that you did. His uncle actually stood up to them. But it was still overwhelming for him," Domhnall said. "So Kyle left to help round them up and have the Commissioner's people arrest them. He should be back soon."

"Thanks. Sounds like it was a good thing that Kyle had someone on him, then," Toby said.

"Yes, sir. Very good," Domhnall said.

"Domhnall, why do you keep calling me 'sir'?" asked Toby.

"I'll stop when you no longer need it, sir. You're another one that's been so far down that you forgot what up is," Domhnall said. "Right now, you're just going from one thing to another, and not really thinking about who you are now and where you're going. That'll pass. And you'll know that it has when I start calling you by name."

"You're saying that I need it to bolster my ego," Toby said.

"Something like that. I'm not sure it's actually ego as much as something deeper. A sense of your own worth. A self-image, if you will," Domhnall said. "You'll reach a time when I no longer need to remind you that you're in charge – when you've got a better idea of who YOU are and what you can do. You know, Mata did something like this, in her own way, with Muriel, at first. Muriel actually thought that Mata was running things. Mata had to jolly her along, kidding with her, and letting her run with events as they came up, for a while, until she found her feet. The same will happen with you, you know. Certainly nothing to be concerned about. You're doing fine. And you're reaching the people that need to be reached. Sir."

"OK," Toby said, seriously. "I'll take your word for it. It's just . . . it's hard to think of you as subordinate to me."

"Maybe this will help, sir. I may be older than you are, but you've got more experience," Domhnall said. "Yes, we're the training, but every human has contributed to taking it way beyond what we started with. You, included, with that method of putting out fires."

"But, that was just obvious!" Toby said.

"Yes, but nobody had applied it to buildings, before. Small stuff, yes," Domhnall said. "But nothing like an entire building. You built off the experiences of other humans in their handling of shields. And now, every Envoy knows about it and how to do it. That's the creativity that humans have and we lack. You can see new applications of things simply

because you are facing more problems in a year that Envoys face in a century. Like our appearing as huge brutes when we go into action, even though we're no more dangerous that way than in our present form. Or having no doors or windows to the prison, and in the back of your mind was the idea of telling them that we'd push them through the wall by osmosis. And the correlation of having the Envoys inside the prison show wings and glow to make them think that their imprisonment was an eternal punishment for their behavior. We wouldn't have thought of either of those. But you did, so we played it out. And, because we played it out, we could see the effect on the men, and the humor in the situation. Sir."

And Toby busted up laughing at that long tirade followed by the suddenly remembered 'sir'. "OK, Domhnall, if that's the way you want it. I'll just go back to my office and think high level thoughts while you and the rest go on about actually running this place." And still laughing he went to his desk.

Shortly after, Kyle came in with his uncle. The man was obviously shaken up by his experience, but seemed to be coming out of it. "OK, Uncle Ewan, just sit and relax for a minute. You're all right. And now you know that your personal shield will protect you," Kyle was saying.

"He . . . he shot me!" Ewan said.

"No, he shot AT you," Kyle said. "It never hit. Here, make a charm out of it. So you'll always remember that your personal shield works."

"T-T-That's the bullet?" Ewan asked, looking at Kyle's open hand.

"Yep. That's the one. You can even match the marks on it to the lands of the gun," Kyle said. "If you weren't wearing a police uniform, you'd be eligible for a red strip down your legs. Of course, others in your force would be eligible, too."

"I did it?" Ewan asked. "I actually stopped a bullet?"

"Yep. Here, put this in your pocket. You'll figure out something to do with it," Kyle said. "And just think what it would mean for your men and women to take the training. Well, you saw what I did. When I got your shock of being shot at, I translated in and froze twenty people in shields. Then helped your people arrest them, and even supplied extra handcuffs. One person against twenty. Think what that could do for patrols. Think what it could do for response times. Oh, you don't have to do the training, yourself. Send them out here and I'll train them. We've got the people, we've got the facilities. Just make it small groups – maybe five at a time."

"You really think it would help?" Ewan asked.

"Definitely," Kyle said. "Uncle, I was never a good cop, because I didn't understand how to be. That's changed. And we've got law courses, and procedures from three or four agencies, both in Britain and in America. Techniques that work to save lives. We've got the ability to teach them to make uniforms that always look fresh, and sharp, no matter what.

Send a squad over and let us show you what can be done.”

“Well . . . I'll have to think about it,” Ewan said. “The cost”

“The cost is nothing. Just like it was for you, uncle,” Kyle said. “And that includes a medical checkup and fixing any problems they may have, learning how to protect themselves, learning how to make things from shields, like clothing, learning how to translate based on their own knowledge, an image, or even a link-back through a telephone call. It also includes any courses they need, like the 'battlefield first aid' and law courses and the procedures I talked about. I think what you're worried about is what the city council will think about your people taking the training. And that's just an unreasonable attitude to take. The important thing is the people of this city. If you have problems with the politicians, let me know. I'm sure we can convince them to change their minds in our favor.”

“How”

“Send me five people. One from each of five different squads. We'll train them, and put them up, here, while they're being trained,” Kyle said. “Mind you, five volunteers. We can't force people to take the training. They have to want it. See how they do in action. THEN we'll talk about how to get some more trained. OK?”

“Will this be all right with Toby?” asked Ewan.

“Of course it is,” Toby replied. “It's what we're here for, is to train. Just let us know when you've got five volunteers, and we'll come get them. No sense tying up a car for this, since they won't need it, afterward.”

“OH! I say! I hadn't thought of that,” Ewan said. “Very well, I'll have to talk to them,” he added, straightening up.

“Good,” Kyle said, smiling.

Chapter 21

Strike Force and Flying Squad

(Wednesday morning)

"Kyle," Ewan's voice came from the speaker phone, "can you come here? I think we've got your five volunteers." And a cheer went up from Kyle's squad in his apartment that he could feel, if not hear .

"Be right there, uncle," Kyle replied, grinning, and hanging up. Before he could leave, the manager of Guest House was at his door.

"Sir, there's a suite behind Toby's office that can be made into a squad room for you," he said. "If you don't mind, I'll have a couple of my people see to that while you go get your volunteers."

"Oh, would you?" Kyle asked. "I'd appreciate it."

"It's what we're here for, sir," the manager said, "is to provide service to you and the Ambassador. And especially for something like this, it's important."

"Well . . . thank you, sir. But now I'd better be going," Kyle said.

"Of course," the manager said, and translated out. Followed shortly after by Kyle and his squad.

They translated into a madhouse. Ewan Ferguson was backed into his office, and people were hollering at him. At first, Kyle thought there was trouble, and was about to take action, when he suddenly realized what the commotion was. So, he just triggered the 'SCREE' sound to silence them.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I can only take five at a time, and not more than one from any single squad. And then, only with your sergeant's permission," Kyle's voice boomed out. "I promise you, if this works out this time, then we'll see about doing more people, and more at a time. But right now, all my office has room for is five at a time. Please. Be patient. Or come out on your days off, and we'll see if we can fit you in somehow. But NOT all at once. We just don't have the resources to handle more just yet." And the crowd, grumbling, began to disperse.

When the way was clear, Kyle went to his uncle's office. "What prompted that?" he asked.

"Oh, some of them saw the bullet," the Commissioner said, pointing to a plaque on his desk with the bullet and date on it. "So they asked about it, and I told them. Well, the news was all over the building after that, and patrol persons started crawling out of the woodwork to volunteer. Apparently, being able to stop a bullet without being hurt meant something to

them.” And Kyle laughed.

“It would, uncle. It means that they KNOW that they'd be going home after the shift was over,” he said.

“Oh! I never thought of that. Of course it would mean something to them. Well, here are your first volunteers,” Ewan said.

“All right,” Kyle said. “You people realize that this means you'd be learning the basic Envoy techniques, then the add-ons that people have come up with to supplement them, and then the techniques and courses specific to police activities?” At the collective nods, he went on, “This isn't costing you or the department anything. And I'm paid by Home to do this, so you don't have to worry about ANY costs for all this. But I can't force anyone to be trained. You have to ask for it.” And he got a jumbled request from five people at once. “Very good. So, let's go!” And he and his squad translated everyone out.

They translated into the front desk area of the Guest House, and one of the Envoys there, grinning, showed him where his new office was. And he was impressed. He was more impressed by the fact that five doctors from the clinic – Envoys, of course – where there waiting for them, and took the volunteers in charge to check them over, then had them seated in recliners. Kyle went into the litany that Muriel had developed for causing humans to connect to their souls, and shortly five people were deep into contact shock, and being monitored by the doctors.

When the last had come out of it, Kyle said, “OK, now the fun begins. My squad is going to connect to you, mentally, and pass you the extended information that can help you with the rest. These are things that have been developed over nine years, from what I understand. This will give you the basic information on creating a personal shield, and we'll practice that until you are confident in it.” And so it went. Step by careful step. Breaking them up between male and female to teach them to make clothing – and that supplemented by letting them know that they could come back to the clothing shops, here, to get help with designing personal clothing. Then, on to translations, and the all important translation to Home and back.

“Now, I can award you your stripes, but I'll have to ask Toby to hand out your passports,” he said, pulling his out to display it, then sitting down in shock. “TOBY! What is this?” Kyle bellowed. “When did this happen?”

“It happened when you took on the task of training police and firemen,” Muriel said, over the top of a laughing Toby. “We figured you'd notice sooner or later.”

“ME? An Ambassador?” Kyle asked.

“Yep,” Muriel said. “We'll see about setting up a bigger office, and getting you three more squads. Oh, and the training room behind the reception desk is always available for training. And, when this crew is done, I'll show you how to do a hundred at once, if you want. It really isn't more difficult than one at a time. Or even five at a time.”

"What's going on?" asked one of the volunteers.

"Well," Kyle said, catching his breath, "it would seem that I was made an Ambassador without my even knowing about it. It wasn't until I pulled out my passport and saw the word 'Diplomat' on it, that I realized what had been done."

"That mean you can hand out passports, now?" the volunteer asked.

"Yes. Or Toby can, if you prefer," Kyle said, dazed.

"Or I can," Muriel said. "Oh, I'm sorry. You may not know who I am. I'm Ambassador Muriel, the Leader of Home. I'll have to teach Kyle how to make the passports, but that won't take long. I'll give it to him, now, then you can all decide who you want to sign the paperwork inside." Which caused Kyle to suddenly look inside at his certificate for being an Ambassador, and realized that Muriel had signed it. And he felt dizzy, again. "Sorry, Kyle. Things happen fast around me," Muriel added, laughing, and gave him the information.

Kyle came out of it, shortly, then stood up and asked those that wanted him to sign them to raise their hands. Four of them did, and were directed to look in their 'no pockets' for the little green booklets. The fifth, a woman, asked Muriel to do it, apologizing to Kyle, but it meant something to the woman that Muriel was the Leader of a whole world. Kyle just smiled and said, "Yea. I understand." And the woman got her wish.

"Now, Kyle," Muriel said. "Were you intending to give them the Rescue and Recovery information that Marcia came up with?"

"Well, yes. Marcia DID say she wanted it out there," Kyle said.

"GOOD! The more people that can do that the better it is. Sure, you managed, instinctively. But that course covers a lot more possible situations and problems," Muriel said. "So, what else?"

"Scottish law, the department procedures, and the procedures from the London Mets and the Secret Service and FBI in America," Kyle said. "Those aren't just take-down information, but information on how to conduct investigations. They can always come back for anything else they need. Though they might have to talk to Toby's security chief for them."

"OK, let's get them done, then turn them loose," Muriel said. "Then I'd like to talk to you."

"Oh, oh. That sounds serious," he said, and dumped the courses onto them. "OK, folks, if you go back out to the front desk, you'll be shown where your rooms are. Your servants are Envoys, and you can talk to them about any of the training you've had, or anything else you can think of," Kyle said. "Relax, let it all seep in, and I'll see you tomorrow morning." And the five left.

"So, what did I do wrong?" asked Kyle.

"Nothing. Don't be so defensive," Muriel said, smiling and taking a seat in his casual area. "I was just wondering a couple of things. Were you intending to start a Rescue and Recovery unit up here?"

"I don't think that would be necessary," Kyle said. "If we can't figure out how to extract somebody, then I'd holler for Marcia."

"Sounds good. What about your office. This worked for today, but I'm going to give you three more squads. For one thing, that will help both you and Toby with training, because then you can both pitch in for the basics," Muriel said. "And for another thing, we've found that eight squads in an Enclave tend to stabilize it. And it gives you more backup if something goes down. Both of you. So, where do you want your office?"

"GAD! I don't know. Wherever Carla wants to put it, I suppose," Kyle said.

"OK, I'll have her get with you on that," Muriel said. "Now, I still need to give you the Ambassador's course. It's not big, and should open right up for you. Especially if you just dump it to your soul. But it will give you some things you might need in dealing with outsiders." And she did. "One other thing. You've demonstrated that you can work with the man that you tried to shoot, that you've reformed your attitude, and that you've taken on a responsible position. I'll be going up before the judge and asking him to lift the probation on you. I don't KNOW that he will, but Alice – my lawyer – has been working on the possibilities and the details, and she'll actually be presenting it. Toby will be there to attest to your change. And you'll have to be there, too. Any problem?"

"You really think I'm ready?" asked Kyle.

"If I didn't, I wouldn't be doing this," Muriel grinned. "Yea, you're ready. Oh, you may have things you have to ask, along the way. There's no way we can cover every contingency. But yea, you don't need your hand held anymore. You've done good, Kyle. You should be proud of how far you've come. OH! The Ambassadorship. It's not like Toby's. Yours is specifically for training and liaison with the emergency responders."

"I can live with that," Kyle said. "Muriel, I can't thank you enough for thinking that I could be reformed, and giving me the chance."

"No problem. I recognized something in you that was the same as was in me," Muriel said. "And figured that it couldn't HURT to take a chance. But you started turning it around fairly quickly."

"That would be Toby, talking to me and treating me as if nothing had happened," Kyle said. "And then learning some about the people in this area, and how he tried to help them. With nothing himself, and he was trying to help them. Then watching him deal with the army of ruffians that came to take him out. Now THAT was just plain over the top."

"Yea," Muriel laughed. "I heard about what Domhnall did. I also heard what Taylor and Arline did to poor Eddie. THAT would have boosted Toby's image in the community, I'm sure. I've heard that Eddie is the biggest gossip in the area, which is how he got his nickname. It would have been all over before the day was out, if he weren't sequestered here."

"Muriel, the Judge refused to reduce the probation. In fact," Alice said, "he refused to accept my credentials. Not a good choice for him, since he'd already accepted them and it was part of the record. I showed him a copy of an email and asked him how long he'd like to continue being a judge."

"You threatened a judge?" asked Muriel.

"DAMNED straight," Alice said. "It was one of the possibilities that I had to contend with. The company that tried to put the hit on the Scottish Enclave and the Commissioner? They bribed the judge to keep Kyle on probation. In fact, they 'suggested' that he move Kyle to a more responsible probation officer, and declare the Enclave and anyone with Envoy training to be part of a terrorist group. And that's what was in the email."

"How'd you get it?" asked Muriel.

"Risk management. Your crew was pulling in everything on that company that they could find, and that information was part of it. Mata fast-tracked it to me," Alice said. "I simply suggested that he return whatever bribe money he'd taken, and cut all ties with that company or be charged with conspiracy to assault two officers of the law – Toby being an officer in fact by the treaty naming all Ambassadors as 'Special Investigators'. Well, I added a few more charges and treaty violations, and the man crumpled. Kyle, your probation is over. He had it typed up and signed on the spot."

"Are you SURE you're not an attack dog?" Muriel asked Alice, laughing.

"I prefer to think of myself as a osprey, if you don't mind," Alice said, drawing herself up in mock formality. "I just keep fishing until I get what I need." Then she busted out laughing, joining Muriel. "However, Kyle, I'd suggest that you remember that you ARE an Ambassador. Keep your shield up and sticky. Somebody grabs you, let them. Then translate back here with them stuck to your shield and have Toby's boys do their thing with incarcerating them. It goes to interfering with an Ambassador in the performance of his duties and treaty violations. Hopefully, Muriel can roll up that company before too much longer, and we can make their behavior and their punishment public. That should cool the rest of them."

"Is that going to blow our investigation of the company?" asked Muriel.

"I honestly don't know, Muriel," Alice said. "Mata's watching the financials and other indicators, and is prepared to move to freeze accounts as soon as something shows up. And a watch is being put on the officers. Any indication that they're trying to leave the country will be fast-tracked to you."

"OK, one more question. Do we have enough to just roll them all up, now?" asked

Muriel.

"We have enough for probable cause. That would give us all the records, and we might find something there. Muriel," Alice said, "I just don't know on this one."

"Would it get rid of the bad apples in the Scottish Parliament?" Muriel persisted.

"Oh, easily," Alice replied. "Also in the police department, the media, and the agitators out on the street, including a couple of the roving gangs that are taking their money on a regular basis."

"Mata," Muriel said and sent. "Pull the trigger. I'll be right there." Then, to her lawyer, "Alice, even if we can't get enough to make the charges stick in court, I think this will hurt them. I know how you like things buttoned up tight. But sometimes one just has to fight a gorilla warfare. We make this public enough, and the court of public opinion will turn against them."

"You know it won't stop there. It's an oil company," Alice said.

"Yep. But Fred's been working that side of it. You haven't seen it, yet, but we may have enough on that side to show collusion between the oil companies," Muriel said. "And that should take care of the rest of the problem. Gotta go. See you later folks. And congratulations Kyle."

Chapter 22

Indictments, Indictments, Indictments (Thursday morning)

Late Wednesday afternoon, before the Members of Parliament left for the day, they were informed that there would be a session on Thursday morning, and that everyone was to attend. Arline made the decision when she found out that Muriel was beginning the roll up of the oil company. Kyle, in the mean time, was getting used to his new squads and office. The general manager of the Guest House was prepared to lock down the Scottish Enclave, allowing no one but Toby, Kyle, their squads and whoever they brought in, either in or out. Muriel had requested aid from Home, and hundreds of Envoys were ready to mobilize. Even Taylor was on high alert. They didn't know it yet, but Taylor would be speaking to the Scottish Parliament. And they wouldn't like the results.

No plan survives the first engagement with the enemy. And the enemy didn't wait. At six o'clock in the morning the offices of the Members of the Scottish Parliament were firebombed. Toby and Kyle went into action. The fires were put out with minimal damage, and the ones that set the bombs were rounded up as they tried to leave the building. It wasn't a good day for fire-bombers. Muriel arrived with her squads, and the questioning began. The results were rather grim. And Alice had the hard evidence she needed to put the company away.

As they were getting ready to leave, an officer came up to Kyle. "Sir, would you come with me, please," the officer said.

"Oh? What's this about, officer," Kyle responded, as suddenly they were surrounded by twenty one Envoys.

"I'm afraid I'll have to take you in for breaking probation," the officer replied.

"Really! Astounding. However, the probation was lifted. Your department should have gotten the information yesterday," Kyle said.

"Nonetheless, sir, you'll have to come with me," the officer said, and made to grab Kyle's arm. And stuck. Kyle grinned.

"I think, rather, that you will find that YOU are under arrest, and will shortly be questioned by the one person that you will wish you'd never met," he said, and translated the man to the Scottish Enclave, where Muriel was waiting.

"I hope you didn't mine my borrowing your new office," she said, grinning.

"Naw. I never use it, anyway. I'm too busy catching little fishies. But he might have some information," Kyle said.

"Well, let's see what he has to say. Oh, you can release him, now," Muriel said. Then she went to work. The first thing they discovered was that he was a fake. The second thing they found was who sent him to pick up Kyle, and how many others there were and who they were. This information was fired off to Muriel's squads to do some track-backs. And the results were astounding

That's why, at eight o'clock, when Arline called the session to order, there were some very shocked faces. Taylor was standing there, in formals, and Ralph and his squads were ranged around the perimeter, ready to take action. The sight of the blue tunics and hats, and almost anonymous faces were chilling to the MSPs.

"Ladies and gentlemen, when I spoke to you last, I gave you to Monday to clean up your act. Unfortunately, certain criminal activities have accelerated that schedule," Taylor said. "What is left of you will still have the original deadline. However, five of you will be removed from this chamber for assault on officers of the law, attempted abduction of an Ambassador of Home, attempted assault on an Ambassador of Home, and the invasion of an Embassy in violation of the treaty that this country has with Home. Other charges will also be pending, and still others may be laid against the individuals named as our investigations continue. The people you see in the blue tunics and hats are 'Crown Special Investigators', with authority to arrest. Please don't try to resist them. They have abilities far beyond what you may think, and you WILL be arrested."

"The following people will now be removed from this assemblage," Taylor said, and started reading names. As he did, Ralph would go to the person and formally place him under arrest, then turn him over to one of his Envoys. It took some time, but when it was finished, Taylor said, "The age of bought and paid for government is ended. Your responsibility is to ALL the people in your care. If you can't do that, resign. Otherwise, I will hope to meet you under better circumstances." And he, Ralph, the squads and the arrested MSPs translated out to the Scottish Enclave.

There, in the Enclave, Toby was putting up more prison space, and Carla was watching. "It's so nice to see people that will learn," she said. "And I see what you're doing. You modularized it. That way, you can add on on the ends, or stack them up. But why no doors or windows?"

Toby grinned, both at the compliment and at what he was about to tell her. "The no doors and windows is security. If they can't translate, they can't get out. But in addition," he said, and sent Carla the record of what Domhnall had done, and what was waiting inside. And Carla roared with laughter.

"That is a Muriel style trick. I'll have to compliment Domhnall on it," she said. "And they're all isolation cells?"

"Yep. No ability to communicate between them, nor even see that there's anybody around them. All they ever see is Envoys in white, and with wings. The Envoys are getting a kick out of it. Oh, they're very polite and everything," Toby said. "But they're in on the gag, and you'd be surprised how much information you can get out of people that way. It's like a

mini-Judgment.”

“Oh, gad. Does Muriel know about it?” Carla asked.

“I believe so,” Toby said.

“Then it'll probably be done elsewhere, too,” Carla said. “That's too good a gag to ignore. And you say it's bright in there?”

“Oh, yea. I'll take you in to one, and you can see for yourself,” Toby said. And he did. Envoys were already in there to process prisoners, and Carla was impressed. And laughing. And so were the Envoys. It was obvious that the Envoys were enjoying their jobs.

“We lower the lighting at night. Not out. They're never left in total darkness. But low enough that they can sleep without trouble, but be able to see to get up and around if they need to, like the bathroom or whatever,” Toby said. “Actually, we take pretty good care of them. Except for the restriction on moving around outside their cells, they're treated more like guests than prisoners. And it seems to work. It's like . . . I don't know, I guess that whatever they did just doesn't matter any more, because they've hit the end of the road.”

“Yea. I can see that. Between the stark blue-white of the marble, and the Envoys glowing and with wings, they must think that they really blew it,” Carla said. “Where do they go from here?” she asked, as Toby translated them back out to his office.

“Oh, processed by the locals, once we can be sure that they'll STAY there, that is,” Toby said. “They're formally charged, so there's no problem with letting them go early because they haven't been. It's just that they have no contact with the outside world until they get to the locals.”

“What about lawyers? Don't they need to be able to talk to their lawyers?” asked Carla, as they translated back.

“Good question. So far, no lawyers have come forward wanting to talk to their clients,” Toby said. “And yes, they were allowed to call them. Of course, some of the lawyers may be keeping their heads down, since they're implicated in some of what's been going on, from what I can tell. The rest will get public defenders, when they get to the locals.”

“Excuse me?” the woman from the police volunteers said, “Can you tell me where to find Kyle?”

“Oh! His office got moved. Sorry. Things have been hectic around here, this morning. We moved him into his own building. He got upgraded, and had three more squads added,” Toby said. “I don't know if he's back yet. We had a job to do this morning. Rather unexpected.”

“Did that have to do with the commotion, the day before yesterday?” she asked.

"As a matter of fact, it did. There were two major assaults. One on the Commissioner of Police, and one on this Enclave and me. We back-tracked them to some interesting people, and that's who we're bringing in, now," Toby said.

"You can arrest?" she persisted. Toby just pulled out his passport, opened it to the appropriate page, and handed it to her. "Oh. OH! My gosh! Does Kyle have one of these?"

"Yes. And the decoration on the front of the passport, too," he said, and she looked and saw the 'Diplomat' statement at the top.

"Yea, we saw that. But I didn't realize that it meant that you could arrest people. I mean, this isn't even your country!" she said.

"Actually, it is. We're both citizens of Scotland. The Citizenship of Home is honorary, because we went there and came back, voluntarily, and under our own power," Toby said. "You have the same honorary citizenship."

"I do?" she asked, then answered herself, "I do!"

"It can take awhile to sink in," Carla said, as Toby retrieved his own passport. "I've trained a few that never realized it was a big thing."

"You're an Ambassador, too?" the woman asked.

"Oh, yea. For a while now. Muriel and I were friends back in sixth grade, and she got part of her training one weekend, then invited us to come out and see what she'd been doing," Carla said, grinning. "BOY! Did we find out what she was doing. Not even fully trained, yet, and she ran us through the beginnings of the training, up to what she had. Then she finished up by taking the trip to Home and back, and taught US to do it."

"Sixth grade? How old were you?"

"Twelve. Same age she was," Carla said.

" 'Ambassadors All'? You mean that was you? I mean, they were real? I mean . . . , " and she stammered to a halt.

"Yea, that was us. Those were some wild times," Carla said, laughing. "Things are tamer, now. But Muriel still manages to find some excitement. So, you had one of those sets, too?"

"No, a friend of mine did. He kept saying they were real – based on real events, and stuff. I didn't believe him. He even said that he could do some of the stuff. I thought they were just magic tricks – you know, slight of hand," the woman said. "I've got to find him and apologize to him.

"If your friend was trained, how come you didn't get trained?" Carla asked.

"My parents didn't believe in any of it," the woman said. "But when I saw that bullet on the Commissioner's desk, I asked how it happened. He said he was looking for volunteers, and that's how I ended up over here."

"Toby," Fran said, walking into his office, "I've got your doctor. Finally. Muriel put Aretha on it, and found someone that wanted to go on half time – not run all over a section of London. Something like semi-retired. We offered him the slot, and he jumped at it. He's getting introduced to his squad, now."

"You . . . ," the policewoman started.

"Hi, I'm Fran, and I'm a doctor. I work out of the American Enclave," Fran said.

"And you're one of the friends of Muriel – part of 'Ambassadors All'," the policewoman said.

"Yep. Funny how that set of action figures keeps biting us," Fran said, smiling. "Some tense times. Some of them NOT fun, at all."

"A friend of mine had a set. He kept telling me about these amazing things that you people did, and I didn't believe him. He said that they were all true, and wanted me to read the book that came with them. I wish I had a set, now, so I could find out more," the policewoman said.

"Oh, well, that's easy," Carla said, and pulled a set out of a 'no pocket'. "Here you go. Have fun. Oh, and when you pull them out, just think 'demo' at them. I know it sounds strange, but we added in things that they could do for those that were trained."

"But . . . you can't just give them away!"

"Sure I can. You're a guest, you're a trainee and inside Home property, and I'm an Ambassador," Carla said. "You have rights in Home property. What you get, here, doesn't cost anything, because you're a successful trainee. We only charge visitors, and that only because they expect it. Take a look at Toby's souvenir shop. They've got some other stuff, too, including a sculpture of Taylor when he was just the head of the Regiment of Home. And no, they won't charge you for it. They can see your stripes, and know what that means."

"Hey! What are you two guys doing here," Muriel said, translating in.

"Same as you," Fran replied, "Goofing off."

"Oh. OK. Just checking," Muriel said, and the policewoman's mouth dropped open. "Relax. We always talk to each other like that. OH! 'Ambassadors All'. I take it you never had a set when you were a kid?"

"No. A friend had a set, but I didn't believe him when he said that they were real, and

had done some unreal stuff,” the policewoman said.

“Well, now you've got the capability to do some unreal stuff, yourself,” Muriel said. “It kinda goes with the territory. But, you already know that from being a police officer.”

“Yea, I guess. With ability comes the need to use it in a responsible manner,” she said. “I just wish others felt the same way.”

“They're the ones that will never complete the training,” Muriel said. “It would kill them. Literally. They'd never make it back from Home alive.”

“They'd . . . oh, wow. I've been worried about the wrong things,” she said. “I was afraid that some of the people on the force would get the training, and it would go to their head.”

“It's always a possibility,” Muriel said. “But that's why we teach people to check against their balance. Basically, if it harms another person to no good purpose, then it's a negative.”

“Is it possible to see if a person wouldn't be able to survive the training?” the woman asked.

“THAT is a VERY good question,” Muriel said. “And the answer is 'yes'. Look at their soul. The darker it is, the less chance that they'd survive it. If it's below a medium gray, don't even bother. It's possible. I've done it. But in every case, there were extenuating circumstances that led me to believe that I could bring the person through it. So, if in doubt, contact me or one of the other experienced Ambassadors, and we'll check it. I'm not trying to be nasty. But killing somebody by training them would be as bad as putting a gun to their head and pulling the trigger, just because you didn't like them.”

“YIPE! OK, I get the point,” the policewoman said.

“You can also ask for help from the Envoys of Home. They WILL help. Both you and who you are considering training. You, by checking. Them, by monitoring you and them until you're comfortable with training,” Muriel said. “And yes, I expect you will train. Not as 'I'm now giving you another job', but in the sense that those with the training seem to end up training others.”

“Well, I'd better get this up to my room, then take a look a the souvenir shop,” she said.

“Why not just send it up to your room? You can, you know,” Muriel said.

“What?”

“Really. Think of your room, and where you want it to go. Now think of the package, and think of it going there,” Muriel said. And it went. And the woman gasped.

“Yes, it went where you wanted it to go. Propped up against the pillows on the head of your bed. Have fun, shopping,” Muriel said, smiling. And the woman grinned, and translated

out.

Chapter 23

Accomplishments

(Monday morning)

"You hear about the Scottish Parliament?" Muriel asked.

"Nope. Not a squeak. I was about to go up and find out what's happening," Taylor said.

"Don't bother," Muriel replied, taking her place beside her consort in his office. "They did a house-cleaning. Arline went in this morning and made it plain that you had meant business, and she intended to make sure that they abided by it. Three MSPs immediately tore up documents in front of her. Then resigned. The rest got down to work looking at what had already been passed, and trying to determine whether it helped the people, or just the companies. They went to voice vote on about twenty of them, and repealed them."

"OUCH! OK, that's going to hurt some companies," Taylor said.

"Things get better. Ferguson got the heads of the departments and the sergeants of the shifts together and laid it on the line. Train or leave," Muriel said. "That was Thursday afternoon. Then he started shoving volunteers at Kyle as fast as he could find them and free them up. Kyle's VERY happy that I taught him how to do large batches at a time. By now about half the force should be trained. And Toby had to take over training the fire departments. Same way. Batches at a time. And both are getting the Rescue and Recovery information along with other things. Kyle thinks he can sell the idea of a resource squad to his uncle, too."

"So, Ewan grew a pair."

"Or discovered that he actually had them and never used them," Muriel laughed. "And, it's spreading. Apparently, some visitors from other cities were in town. Some sort of convention. They found out about the training and had some demonstrations of what it could do, and now they want it for their forces."

"So, any backlash from the companies in Scotland?" asked Taylor.

"Oh, yea. From an unexpected place. City council. Toby and Kyle will be going over there this morning and letting them know what's what, now," Muriel said. "They're going to lay it on the line that some things are just plain illegal. And that buying legislation is one of them. Failure to enforce the REAL building codes is another. And that if they don't straighten out, you might be paying them the same sort of visit that you paid Parliament."

"Yep," Taylor said. "That should do it. So, what's left?"

"Ireland. That's gone on for too long," Muriel said. "It's quieter, now, but still there in a

much smaller form, and could break out again. The only thing longer is the conflict between Israel and the Islamic countries. And that's not your problem. It's mine. I'm about fed up enough to just wall off the whole area and let them throw nukes at each other until the problem is ultimately solved. South and Central America show signs of cleaning up their act, whether they want to or not. Africa is another problem, but most of it's internal. And I don't really know how to get a handle on it."

"OK, you made your point. Ireland is mine. I'll find out who the contacts are, and go up. Alone. No squads, no you. Just me. You get involved, and we may NEVER get it straightened out. They'd be looking for ghosties and ghoulies and long legged beasties, and things that go bump in the night to the exclusion of everything else." Muriel just stuck her tongue out at him, and they both laughed. Taylor pulled out his phone and did some searching, found what he was looking for, and told the phone to connect.

"First Minister's office," a woman's voice came from the speaker.

"Good morning. My name is Taylor, and"

"Oh, good lord. One moment, please," and Taylor was put on hold.

A moment later, a man's voice said, "First Minister, may I help you?"

"I hope so. My name is Taylor, and" Once again he was cut off.

"I know who you are Taylor and we want none of it. You've been told that before," the man said. "Now buzz off and quit bothering us." And the phone was disconnected.

"I've got the image," Muriel said.

"So have I," said Taylor. "I think it's time I found out what this is all about. I've never spoken to him before. Or his office. Or ANYONE in Ireland. I'll be back."

"You'd better be. Panther just isn't big enough to keep all of me warm," Muriel said. "It's bloody COLD over here. And damp."

"Poor baby. I can't help it if you're used to a hundred and twenty degrees in the summer," Taylor said, grinning. Muriel flicked her coffee at him. It never landed. And Taylor just laughed and translated out. Muriel grinned, then looked over at Janice, who was also grinning, but in a somewhat wistful way.

And in Belfast, a bell rang, and a man wearing a modern version of an older style suit and a 'cowboy' hat of the same blue color appeared. And the secretary squeaked. "Now," Taylor said, "let's start again. My name is Taylor. I don't know what the mix-up is, but I've never contacted anyone in Ireland before. I'll see the First Minister. Now."

"S-S-Sir!" she said, and was immediately on the phone. And back off. And a door opened.

“WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS?”

Taylor took off his hat, looked at the man, and said, “Do you know me?” And the man did an excellent imitation of someone suffering from apoplexy and having swallowed a fish bone crosswise at the same time. “Now, I don't know who else has been calling you using the name 'Taylor', but I assure you it wasn't me. Would you care to explain to me what's going on and why you reacted to the name like that?”

“Sir! Oh, I do beg your pardon. It's a nothing, a trifle. Certainly nothing to bother someone of your importance, Your Majesty,” the First Minister said.

“Well, just to lay that to rest, why don't you tell me about it, and let me make my own decision. I AM capable of that, you know,” Taylor said. “Or, if you prefer, I could always call my consort. She's quite able to wrinkle out information. Even that of a sensitive nature.”

And the man paled. “Oh, please, no reason to bother her over such a small thing. No reason at all, sir.”

“Uh, huh. And you STILL haven't told me what it is. Muriel,” he said and sent.

“Yes, dear,” her voice seemed to come from the air.

“It appears that I may need your expert abilities, after all. Would you be so kind?” Taylor asked. And another bell rang, and Muriel walked into the office. The First Minister looked weak, and immediately sought a seat, not thinking about the fact that he was now sitting in the presence of his monarch.

“Hmm. I haven't had that effect on people in a long time,” Muriel said. “Must be something important, then. Now, why don't you just tell me all about it. I can be very sympathetic.”

“Please! It's not my fault,” he said.

“Oh, I'm sure. It never is, is it,” Muriel replied, soothingly. “These people just keep coming up to you and making ridiculous claims and wanting things that you don't feel are appropriate.”

“Yes! Yes! Oh, you DO understand,” he said.

“So, how did it start?” asked Muriel.

“It was a couple of weeks ago. I'd stopped off at a pub on my way home. This man came up to me and said his name was Taylor. Tried to get me to foster a bill that would have taken all the foreign companies off the tax rolls. I told him 'no'. Well, since then, he's kept calling me, here, trying to pressure me into doing what he wants. Says that he's got information on me that he'll let out if I don't do what he wants,” the First Minister said. Muriel

pulled out her phone from a 'no pocket', causing another squeak from the secretary, and ran a search on the First Minister.

"Clean," she pronounced. "At least on a fast search. Oh, minor things. The sorts of things that anyone might do, but certainly nothing that would warrant blackmail." A phone rang, and the secretary picked it up.

"It's him, again," she said. And the First Minister waived her off. Taylor quickly went to the secretary's desk and held out his hand. The secretary looked at her boss, and he just shrugged. So she handed the phone to the King.

"Yes? What is it this time?" Taylor said in a passable imitation of the First Minister.

"Boy, you just don't get it, do you. You WILL foster this bill, or you'll be out. I've got the information right here, and will deliver it to the telly studio if I don't get your promise"

And by that time, he was standing in front of Taylor, who took a manila envelope from him, and handed the phone back to the secretary. "Hi," said Taylor. "My name is Taylor. Quite a coincidence isn't it," he added, handing Muriel the envelope. "Now, I think you should just sit down for a minute and let the shock of being found out wash through your system. In the mean time my consort, Ambassador Muriel, the Leader of Home and leader of the 'Crown Special Investigators' for the realm, will take a look at this purported information. I'm sure it will be interesting, since you've taken so much trouble to hold it over this man's head, unsuccessfully."

"I don't know who you think you are," the man said, "but you're in big trouble, now."

"Oh, really! Oh, how delightful. I haven't been in BIG trouble for a while, now. Please, go on. Tell me about my big trouble," Taylor said.

"I don't have to tell you anything. I'll just call my boss and let him handle you," the man said.

"Curiouser and curiouser," Taylor said. "Well, Muriel, what did you find?"

"Rumor, innuendo, outright lies, half truths, manufactured evidence. Give me a couple of minutes and I'm sure I can come up with some other euphemisms for this mess," she said.

"Well, rather, why don't you just come over here and work your special magic on him. I'll record for you," Taylor said. "Government request, if you need that."

"Oh, Taylor! You DO know how to charm a gal. Hi, stupid. My name is Muriel, and I'm your worst enemy. And you're going to tell me ALL about this little scam you've tried to pull," she said, and switched his mind to truth. And he talked. Oh, boy, did he talk. And the ultimate lead back to a coalition of companies that were headed in the United States. Taylor grimly took the record and sent it to Melanie, along with a message that these companies might be removed from the whole of the realm for their behavior.

"Taylor, what do you want me to do with this person?" Muriel asked, as she turned his mind back to normal.

"Good question. How's the police, here?" Taylor asked.

"I don't know, but I can find out pretty quickly," she replied, and pulled out her phone. Five minutes later, a uniformed officer was at the door of the office.

"Hello? Excuse me? Somebody called about an attempted blackmail?" he said, deferentially.

"Ah, good. Yes," Muriel said. "But we're a bit concerned that the source of this blackmail might have reached out to the local police."

"Ma'am, our Chief Superintendent would have us out of the force in a minute if we allowed that," the officer said. "He's trained, you know, as I see you are. About sixty percent of us are, now. So, that's what this is about?"

"Yes, it is. He was trying to blackmail the First Minister with a load of manufactured trash," Muriel said. "Tell you what, why don't you take him, and I'll take the record we made from him, to your Chief Superintendent."

"You made a record? Oh, my! You are advanced," the officer said.

"Not really," Muriel said. "I've been doing this for nine years now. And I teach others how to do it. I'd be happy to talk to your Chief Superintendent about it."

"Oh, ma'am, if you could do that, it would be great. And you said that this man helped you with it?" the officer said.

"Of course. Well, after all, we are rather close," Muriel said, smiling.

"I see. Ma'am, I don't believe I got your name," the officer said.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I should have introduced myself. My name is Muriel."

"OH! Like the Ambassador. That must cause some confusion," the officer said.

"No, not really," Muriel said, handing him her passport. The officer looked at it, and turned pale.

"Oh, ma'am, I'm sorry. I didn't realize!"

"Don't worry about it. Do you have an image of the Chief Superintendent's office?" asked Muriel.

"I do, ma'am. Of course I do. Perhaps I should just call ahead and let him know you're coming," the officer almost pleaded.

"Naw. That won't be necessary," Muriel said, getting the image. "I'm sure he'll figure it out pretty quickly when we meet. Come, dear, we're going to meet the Chief Superintendent, and have a little talk. He's trained, you know." And they translated out.

Chapter 24

An Irish Morning

(Monday morning, later)

A bell rang. Getting tired of hearing that line? Well, it happened anyway. A bell rang and four people translated into the Chief Superintendent's office. The man looked up, tiredly, and said, "Well, Williamson, what is it this time."

"Not him. Me," Muriel said. "My name is Muriel. I asked your officer to arrest this man for attempted blackmail. But, due to the nature of the blackmail, its source and its target, I felt it best to assure myself that he wouldn't somehow be accidentally released to disappear."

"And why would someone named Muriel care about that?" asked the Chief Superintendent. And Muriel handed him her passport.

"Heard about these. Never saw one before. Diplomat, huh?" he said, then opened it. "OH! GAWD! Williamson. What have you done to me?"

"Oh, dear," Taylor said. "I'm afraid that you're really going to be upset, then. You see, my name is Taylor." And the Chief Superintendent collapsed back in his chair and rubbed his face.

"Your right. I'm upset. This is NOT what I needed today. I've got companies coming out of my ears trying to get me to arrest people on trumped up charges, tying up my people, and now you two. OK, what is it?"

"Well, first," Taylor said, "relax. How about some tea?" And he placed a mug in front of the man. "We really aren't here to cause you trouble. But, if it's as you say, then we might be able to cause trouble for someone. Perhaps you should play this short record of information that this person was so kind to give us," and handed the head cop the record. He played it, then picked up the phone.

"Get legal in here, immediately!" he said. And moments later a man appeared. "DON'T say a word. Just look at this." And played it again. As it played out, a grim sort of grin graced the man's face.

"Well, Ryan, if this can be proved out, then I'd say that we finally have a hold on them," the man from legal said. And Ryan handed the man Muriel's passport. "Well, well, well. And if you're thinking that I'm about to say something like 'faith and begorrah' you can take yourself out of here."

"Actually," Muriel said, "I was expecting an entirely different set of euphemisms and epithets. Personally, I'd say that you're taking it much calmer than most people I meet. But then, most of them are either over-awed for some crazy reason, or trying to flee. Me? I'm just a woman doing a job." And the lawyer looked up at her.

"Can you get any hard evidence on this?" he asked.

"Can you give me about five minutes to find out?" asked Muriel. Then overrode any answer. "Mata, catch. Can we get hard evidence on this? Irish legal?"

"Hold on, Muriel, I'll check," Mata's voice came from the air. "Irish legal, huh? OH, MY! Yea, I can see why they'd want it. Hold on. Squad one and Fred's squad are BOTH on it. And you don't want to know what kind of dance Fred is doing. OK, we've got emails, financials, the possibility of letters and messages if you can roll them up. If we weren't restricted to Irish legal, then we'd probably be able to get more. Muriel, warn them this is VERY dirty. Here's the copies of the information we found. And Alice said it would make good probable."

"Hmm," the lawyer said, looking over the pages. "Yes, but how did you get this. And so fast?"

"Page three," Muriel said, indicating her passport. "We have computers that can do a lot more than play solitaire and crash. And, turned loose, we can even give you transcripts of phone calls, or contents of messages and letters. They're VERY good computers. However, in this case, getting the financial links was only a little gray. We're authorized to investigate in the case of illegal activity. And this started with a blackmail attempt of a high political official. So it was cleared by the crown. Same with emails."

"And how did you get the crown clearance so quickly? Oh, I should have said. My name is Ross."

"Hi, Ross. And as to how I could get the clearance so quickly, that's his fault," Muriel said, pointing to Taylor.

"His . . . oh, lord. Your Majesty, I apologize."

"No need. And it's Taylor unless we HAVE to be official. I learned that from her?"

"And why from her?" Ross asked, then looked at Muriel. "You're going to tell me to look at a different page, now, aren't you."

"Yep. Page two."

"Ryan, I'm going to need some of that tea . . . where'd you get the mug?" And Muriel passed him one. He took a healthy swig, then sat down, then did a double-take and stared at it.

"Williamson, why don't you take this desperate person down and book him. Make sure they know that he is NOT to be let out under any circumstances. And if he manages to get a lawyer in here to try to spring him, I want to know before they even unlock the cell," Ryan said.

"Oh, gad. Now I've done it," Ross said. "Sitting in the presence of the King."

"Oh, stuff it," Taylor said. "The one good thing about being informal is that you CAN sit in my presence."

"And the Leader of Home?"

"AND the Leader of Home," Muriel replied. "Like he said, I taught him about the lack of formality and being casual. And that started nine years ago, when I first met him. Taylor, is there anything you need to get back for?"

"Not really. And I can clear anything with Janice very quickly. Why?"

"We're staying. I see a bunch of things wrong here. And they can be righted. Or at least a start at being righted," Muriel said. "They don't have passports, for example. And they don't have the add-ons to the basic training. That means that they were probably trained wild. They need the add-ons, and maybe some of the law and procedure courses, too."

"Gotcha. OK, bring your squads?" asked Taylor.

"Danged straight. Your's too. We should be able to get a bunch done in fairly short order. Oh, SHOOT!" Muriel said. "We need an Ambassador up here to finish them up. Ryan, who do you have that you think would make a good teacher, but is NOT a cop?"

"Why?"

"You need an Ambassador up here, to hand out passports and help you get the training you need. Both for new people, and for existing that need to be upgraded," Muriel said. "We'll need some property, too, enough for a small Enclave. WE buy the property and pay the taxes on it. And from that point on it's an Embassy, and operates under the rules of Home. The last one we did, we took over a failed construction site that covered a city block. But that's actually a little large. Even a warehouse that's empty, we can demolish it and have a building up in a couple of days. Self-sufficient. Power fails in the city, and it would still have all it's utilities."

"You've done this before, haven't you?"

"MANY times," Muriel said. "One of my friends is and Architect and Engineer, and licensed in America, Britain, China, Russia, and a few other countries. She builds using Envoy techniques, and what she does is phenomenal."

"She do that white building in London?"

" 'The Welcoming One'? Yea, that was her," she said.

"Beautiful place. High end architecture. Couldn't see staying there, as it had to be

expensive,” Ryan said. And Muriel laughed.

“We use it to get people off the streets. Homeless, destitute, foreclosed on, all sorts. It's run by Envoys, and walk-ins that CAN pay don't pay as much as some of the dives that say they are hotels,” Muriel said. “You should have stopped and asked.”

“Wish I'd brought my camera that day. People don't believe what it looked like,” Ryan said.

“Well, maybe we can do something one better,” Muriel said, and concentrated for a minute, then handed him a sculpture – miniature to the one in the building. “Here. This is what's behind the desk, and this was what she was trying to portray.”

“That looks like a woman with wings,” he said.

“Yea. Sixteen year old woman, for the building. The sculpture was just a month or so ago. Took nine people all at the same time to give me the image. And an hour and a half to create it. Fun, though, even if I was exhausted afterward,” Muriel said.

“YOU did this?” Ryan asked. “But, how'd you get the wings?”

“Oh, dear. OK. Spread out, people,” she said. And, when Taylor had moved back, and Ross had moved to another chair, she went into display. To say that it shocked the men was an understatement. “Frank, can you come here? We need a shelf for this man.”

“I thought you were human!” Ross said.

“I am,” Muriel said.

“What of, and where do you want it,” Frank said. “Oh, 'The Welcoming One'. OK, so, sir, where would you like it put?” And the Chief Superintendent just stared at him.

Finally, he said, “You're an Envoy?”

“Yes, sir. One of Muriel's squad members,” Frank said.

“But,” Ross said, as Muriel resumed her normal look. “How can a human do that?”

“Your soul knows,” Muriel said. “And, I'll show you how to unlock that knowledge, and much more.”

“Ross, I'm beginning to think you short-changed me,” Ryan said.

“Ryan, I'm beginning to think *I* was short-changed. And if this young lady wants to make up the deficit, then I'm more than willing to learn.”

“When did you get trained?” Muriel asked Ross, as Ryan showed Frank where to put

the shelf.

“God! That was five years ago, I think. It was when those training stations popped up all over. There was a young lady there, dressed in something outlandish, and she was pushing people through the training as fast as she could. I was down in London for a meeting when I saw the training stations, and stopped in to find out what they were about. Well, I found out, all right.”

“That would have been one of the Regiment, then. And they weren't Ambassadors at that point. We were concentrating on getting people trained, and figured on going back through and giving out passports,” Taylor said. “And you must have hit them at a peak time, when some of them were getting frazzled by the volume of people. You're right, Muriel. These people need an Ambassador up here. OK, we need to go looking. But NO YOUNGSTERS! The last time you did that, she turned out to be a terror.”

“Wimp. Can't take it that a mere girl can out-do you?” asked Muriel.

“Wimp nothing,” Taylor said. “That girl is abnormal! I KNOW she's human. But what she does with a horse is unreal. And what she does dancing is impossible.”

“Yep. That's Anna, all over,” Muriel grinned. “Anyway, if you two have nothing else to do, how about we treat you to lunch. Any good restaurants around?”

“Well, there's one. It's about a mile away,” Ryan said. “Caters to a wild crowd, but they never get rowdy.”

“Oh, tell them, Ryan. The only reason we can afford to go there is because he won't take our money. Says we're trained, so we don't pay, there. And insists that we come back from time to time,” Ross said.

“Sounds promising,” Muriel said. “Can you picture it from the outside?”

“Yes, I think so,” he said, and concentrated.

“Greene's? Is that the one?” asked Muriel, and created a model of it from what she could see of the front of the building.

“YES! My goodness! How do you do that?” asked Ross.

“We'll teach you. Honest. Be patient,” Muriel said. “OK, let's go see if they've got room for us.” And she translated the four to the front of the building. It was open, and there didn't seem to be a line in front of it. As they approached, the doorman suddenly straightened up to attention and saluted. And Taylor laughed.

“It could only be one man,” he said. “He was a cook for the Regiment, and retired, what, six years ago? Said he was going home to start a restaurant.” And sure enough, they got inside and suddenly seemed to be enveloped by waiters and one HUGE man.

"Greeney, you scoundrel! How many of the Regiment did you steal?" asked Taylor.

"Why, Your Majesty, you cut me to the quick. I didn't take any more than my fair share. And ONLY after they'd mustered out," Greene said, laughing. "How have you been, sir?"

"As you can see. I got trapped into a WORSE job than herding you yayhoos around," Taylor said. "Got a mate, and I think the food is better than you used to supply."

"Glad to see you hooked up with someone. Welcome Ambassador Muriel. It's a pleasure to finally meet you. Oh, Your Majesty, I think my cooking may be better, now. Especially since I don't cook. Some guy by the name of Chuck stopped by, one day, and dumped a whole load of information on me, including how to create complete meals." And Muriel started laughing.

"Figure Chuck to do that," Muriel said to Taylor. "And now he's cooking for you." And Greene started laughing.

"Come this way. I've got just the right place for you." And Greene led them toward one near the back, roped off from the rest. "This here one has been waiting for you since I built the place," he said. "NOBODY sits here unless the boss is with them. And people know it. I just wish I could have gotten a picture of you, to go with the rest of the guys and gals that I worked with." And Muriel looked around, and realized that the walls were 'wallpapered' with photographs of members of the Regiment.

"Muriel, behave yourself!" Taylor warned. "I've seen that look on your face, before. Usually just before you get into trouble."

"Oh, it's no trouble, Taylor. I just thought that there is a way he could have something of you, here, if he could find a space for it," Muriel said.

"Muriel, you wouldn't dare! It's too big to fit, here," Taylor said, while Muriel calmly created the twelve inch model of Taylor in full charge. "Aw, c'mon, Muriel. I was a KID, then."

"You were older than I was. And this was what the Regiment was all about. Greene, is there some place where you could put something like this, but about man tall?" asked Muriel.

"I'll make a place. I heard about this sculpture. Saw some pictures of it. Never got a chance to see the real thing. That was after I retired," Green said, and led her over to a corner. "This has always been an awkward corner. Not big enough for four, and too big for two, really." And he removed the table by the simple expedient of dissolving it. Muriel put the sculpture on the floor, then stood back. And the sculpture grew. Muriel was going over the sculpture, checking that it grew evenly, and correcting things that the miniature sloughed over, when she heard a voice behind her.

"'Green jacket, red cap, and white owl's feather'. The Fairies. I should have realized. The man was a maniac, but a good Prince. And this. This brings back memories. I saw that

ride. I'd gone over for the signing," the man said.

"He's a good King, too," Muriel said. "And still a maniac, at times. And yea, he combined 'The Fairies' with 'Tom O'Bedlam'. 'With a host of furious fancies Whereof I am commander, With a burning spear and a horse of air, To the wilderness I wander.' And wander to the wilderness of America he did. And came back with me," she added, reflectively.

"Oh, I DO beg your pardon, Madam Ambassador. So, it was you that created this magnificent impossibility?" he asked.

"Yea, I needed to come down off a difficult day," she said.

"How did you get it to have all four feet off the ground?"

"Oh, invisible shield between the ground and the horse's belly. You're an artist?" she asked.

"Oh, no. Only an old school teacher, now retired. Literature, mostly. Oh, NOW I do some art, but only as a hobby," he said.

"You're too young to retire," Muriel said. "That means that you were pushed out, and are just hanging on, now. Maybe we can help each other. I need an Ambassador up here. You're already trained, so it wouldn't take much to add to that. Could I interest you in a job? One that pays? And there's perks that go with it," she added, grinning. "Let us have our lunch, then why don't you come back with us."

Chapter 25

And a Literate Afternoon (Monday afternoon)

"Well, Greene, that was wonderful. Now, about the bill," Muriel said.

"Madam Ambassador, you know the drill. You're trained, you don't pay," Greene said.

"You don't make money that way. And Home can afford it," Muriel said.

"I don't make money, I make food. Making money is illegal. Just ask the Chief Superintendent," Greene said. Which set the table laughing. "Besides," he added, "I'd say you paid for as many meals as you want to eat, here. That little doodad in the corner is going to draw more customers that ARE paying customers than you'd believe. Taylor was popular up here. He didn't play favorites, didn't put on airs. Just got in and got the job done. People know I was in the Regiment. And they respect that. Now, to see a copy of his famous statue, they'll come flocking, and tell their friends. Nope. No bill."

"Well, if that's the way you want it. So, my problem is half-way there. I've got a potential Ambassador for up here. Now, all I need is a place to put him," Muriel said.

"What? Old Hopkins? You'd take him away from me?" Greene asked. "NO! I won't hear of it. Oh, woman, you twist my arm. All right, I'll make you a proposition. And I promise it won't cost you TOO much." And this brought more laughter.

"So, what's your proposition?" asked Muriel.

"What you want is a place for him to live – an Enclave of sorts, that would be his Embassy. Well, it just so happens that I have this building, nearby, and can't do anything with it," Greene said. "The City first told me that I couldn't get it zoned for what I wanted, because no such thing existed, so they had no way to zone it. Then they tried to say that it wasn't fit for occupancy. Then . . . well, you get the picture. After the fifth rejection, I just gave up on it. And I can't even sell it! It's in bad repair, and no one wants the expense of tearing it down, and there's no way to fix it up."

"The charges, Greene," Taylor said. "You forget that I've heard your sob stories, before. Muriel, he's half gypsy. And the other half is made up of equal parts lecher, thief, and conman. The only honest thing about him is his cooking. And now I find out that even THAT isn't honest. He stole it from YOUR cook." And Greene laughed.

"You're right, you know," Greene said. "But this might be just the thing. You need an office for him, an apartment, a place to store trainees and visitors, a place for a small clinic, a small law office, maybe. What else?"

"A souvenir shop," Muriel said. "But yea, that's about it. If he needs more troops, we

can bring them in from all over. And I take it that it's close enough that you'd get spill-over trade by being the 'official' restaurant for the place. Enlightened self-interest is something I can understand. So, where is this flower of dereliction that you want me to take off your hands for a modestly exorbitant fee?"

"OH! She cuts me to the quick! She stabs me in the heart," Greene said, patting around his chest as if looking for said object – and not finding it – while the table laughed again. "Tell you what I'm going to do. I'll sell it to you for the same price that I paid for it. I won't even add on for the monstrous taxes I've had to pay on the useless thing. There is one catch, though."

"Oh, oh, folks. Here it comes. Hang onto your wallets and socks or he'll have them both," Taylor said, laughing.

"So, what's the catch?" asked Muriel.

"Well, I've got another corner," Greene said. "And I saw this statue of you a while back"

"He wants the coronation sculpture, Muriel," Taylor said.

"No. That was pretty, I'll admit. And it told me, just from the look on your faces, that there was something more there than just a passing fancy," Greene said in serious reflection. "No. The one I mean showed her and another girl walking into the future. It just seemed to touch something in me."

"Why is it everyone likes what was just a STUDENT project?" Muriel said to an uncaring world.

"Maybe because it was good," said Hopkins from behind her. "There's only one that I've seen that even compared to it, and it's pure beauty. And I think you had a hand in making that one, too. I saw it behind the desk of a remarkable and unusual hotel in London."

" 'The Welcoming One'," Muriel said. "Yea, that one was fun to do. Carla did it in architecture – indistinct and vague. So, I gave her that sculpture to make it a bit more real, while still making it indistinct."

"You modeled for her?" Hopkins asked.

"Nope. I modeled for me," Muriel said, suddenly serious. "Greene, I'm going to need to see this property, to see if it's large enough to do what you said. Oh, and you'll get your other sculpture for free. I'm feeling magnanimous. But only AFTER I see the property," she added. And that got a laugh from the table.

"Easily done. It's around this one. This used to be the 'house' restaurant. Good location, but the hotel went bust. I figured to do much the same as what you do with a Guest House, and let trained people stay there, free. More as an apartment house than a hotel,"

Greene said.

"Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer . . .," quoted Hopkins. "Yes, two ways. Muriel, you've convinced me. If you can give me the training I need for the job, I'll be your Ambassador. I'm beginning to see the shape of what you want to do. And it would be a glorious summer, indeed."

"Another one quoting Shakespeare," Taylor said. "Why does no one go for the REAL classics?"

"Now, don't you go putting down Richard the Third," Hopkins said. "Many fine actors have managed to make the part memorable. And there was much in Shakespeare that was pithy. Subtle, yes, but thought provoking."

"Training is easy. What isn't easy is figuring out how to separate the property for the purpose of taxes," Muriel said.

"Oh, that's simple," Taylor said. "We pay the taxes on the whole thing. THAT'S where the true cost comes in for your lunch. He wants you to pay the taxes on his restaurant."

"Your Majesty! How could you EVER even suggest such a thing!" exclaimed Greene.

"Easily. It's because it's what you wanted," Taylor said, laughing.

"Well, that may be, but you didn't have to suggest it to her," Greene said, hurt. And the table was laughing, again.

"OK, let me call in my architect, and see if she agrees. Carla, got a minute? Potential Enclave for Ireland," she said and sent.

"Oh, joy. Where?" asked Carla, translating in.

"Around this restaurant," Muriel said.

"Uh, huh. Muriel, girl, you're being scammed. The restaurant is part of the building. You'd end up owning this, too," Carla said.

"He was trained by Chuck," Muriel said, pointing to the expansive Greene. "And used to cook for the Regiment. And he's been trying to do the same thing an Enclave does for trained people. But the City fought him. Oh, leave the name on the restaurant."

"OK, let me look," and Carla translated out. Five minutes later she was back. "No parking, but there's a lot not too far away. Let them have the headaches for a change. Size is good, and we can put an office in one side, with the Ambassador's apartment above it. Lawyer's office behind the Ambassador's office, gift shop near the door, with the clinic closer to the reception desk. The structure is sound, just needs to be upgraded some, and the rooms gutted and re-done. The architecture sucks," she said, then turned to Greene. "Are

you in love with the face of this building? Muriel said to keep your name on it, and I have no problem with that. But we could dress the building up and make it look like it wasn't falling down any more."

And Greene laughed. "WOW! All that from a five minute look. No, I'm not in love with the way the building looks."

"It's my job," Carla said. "OK, Muriel, it's doable. Get the clearance, and in two days you'll have an Irish Enclave. I'm NOT going to fight a city that thinks it's in the middle ages."

"I may be able to cut through that," Taylor said. "If Muriel doesn't mind MY buying the property, then reselling it to her. That takes it right out of the City's hands."

"They'll scream at the loss of tax revenue," Muriel said.

"Oh, I'll play it your way on the taxes. But I'll make it clear that it IS an Embassy, and that it will NOT be subject to city laws. Green, can you take a few minutes off? Oh, and I'll need a lawyer," Taylor said.

"I can help you there," Ross said. "You want two simple cash sales, no mortgage, right?"

"Yep. Be prepared for weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, though. I'll be going in formally. So expect a LOT of fawning and other absurdities," Taylor said.

"Oh, I think, after the refreshing way you do things, we can stand a bit of that to get things going," Ross said. "Ryan, are you coming?"

"I wouldn't mind. I've never seen ANYTHING like the way these people move!" the Chief Superintendent said. "I'd like to see how they take on the whole city."

"Pfft! City, nothing. Muriel's taken on whole countries. You going along with them?" Carla asked Muriel.

"Nope. I have a job to do, here. Another sculpture. Greene's profit for my buying this white elephant off of him," Muriel said. "And upgrading Mister Hopkins education to handle being an Ambassador," she added, as Taylor, Greene, Ross and Ryan translated out.

"Oh, Anthony, please," he said. "If I'm going to be working for you, then there's no sense in your being formal with me."

"OK, well, I can give you part of what you need, directly. But the rest, I'll have to get one of my squad leaders to do," Muriel said.

"Or, you can just let me do the whole thing," Betty said, translating in. "By the way, Muriel, Mata is furious. You're keeping her tied up in the office while you go out and have fun."

"Oh, dear. OK, we'll have to do some rearranging, then. Can't have Mata upset," Muriel said, grinning.

"Well, she said that this is the last time she puts together an Ambassador's security force unless you take her with you," Betty said.

"OK, OK, I'll find a way. Maybe a second security chief," Muriel said.

"DON'T YOU DARE!" Mata's voice rang out of the air. And the four busted up, laughing.

"I think you just put her in her place," Betty said. "She's extremely jealous of the thought of ANYONE doing her job. Now, Ambassador Hopkins, this won't hurt a bit. I'll give you the brief course on being an Ambassador that Muriel developed. But I'll also add in such things as Enclave administration, accounting and finance, and British law. You'll have to wait for Irish law until my team finishes it. Maybe tomorrow. That's just to allow you to understand what you can get away with. Just let them go to your soul and they'll be like you'd learned them years ago, but they'll be still fresh. Then, anytime that you feel that you need something more, just let me know and you'll get it. And . . . you're done."

"WHAT? Just like that?" asked Anthony.

"Oh, sure. There's no reason for it to take time to get an education. In fact, we've shortened up the time a lot, since I started teaching Muriel," Betty said.

"You've been with her all that time?" he asked.

"Nine years. Sometimes hectic, sometimes beautiful, but always eventful," Betty said. "No better position in the world than working with her. She's a GOOD boss."

"OK, time for me to go to work," Muriel said, and headed for a corner. A waiter came out and dissolved the table and chairs, and Muriel grinned. It was obvious that the whole staff was trained. Then she cheated. She grabbed an 'image' of the one Steve had done from her model, and created that in full size, so she wouldn't have to touch it up. Then attached a plaque to the wall identifying it. The same plaque that Steve had put beside it in the building where the signing of the Chinese Treaty was done.

"Remarkable," Anthony said. "And you did this?"

"I did it as a student piece, twelve inches high," Muriel said. "An Envoy in the American Enclave did the full sized version, adding better texture, and the movements. Miniatures of these – the twelve inch size – will be in the gift shop, along with others that I've done. Oh, and the action figures that my friends came up with. I cheated, here. I grabbed the version that Steve did. That's actually the one that's famous. We took that and miniaturized it back down for souvenir purposes."

"So, he took your work and made one from it?" asked Anthony.

"Oh, no, he took my model and blew it up to life-size, then added the textures that I didn't know how to do at that time," Muriel said. "Well, it WAS my first project. He also added the blowing hair and fly plaid. But the basic form was the same as what I'd done. Right down to facial features and such. So, he claims that I did it, and I claim that he did it." And Anthony laughed.

"It's still a remarkable piece. And, if people didn't know that both the figures in it were you, they'd miss the subtle message," he said. "It's how you look at the world."

"Yea. Kinda," Muriel said. "It's actually more complex than that. But it was all I could put into it at sixteen. Oh, I ought to put up a plaque for Taylor's, too." And, as she moved to that sculpture, a plaque appeared on the wall.

"CHARGE!"

Taylor To The Front

By Muriel

"Yea, that pretty much sums it up," Anthony said. "You know, there's another sculpture that I've seen. Of the two of you, together . . ."

"Where we walked off the stage at the coronation," Muriel added for him. "Yes, if you like, I can have a model of it in your office for you."

"I'd like that. I think it's the best expression of how you actually operate," Anthony said. "Neither one of you is leading. But you're both facing the future, together. And it goes WAY beyond friendship, or what people call love. It's something that can't be described but can only be felt. You two are very lucky to have it."

"Luck had nothing to do with it. There was attraction there from the beginning. But we BOTH had to grow up and be sure of ourselves," Muriel said. "And it took a lot of work to achieve that. But we made it. No, neither one of us leads the other. Oh, we're both leaders in our own way and our own areas of concern. We're independent, but together."

"I think it's more than just that. You are each supportive of the other, too. Without being clingy, or anything like that," Anthony said. "Like his finding a way to bypass the city by declaring the property a possession of the Crown, then selling it to you to use as an Embassy. And not a thing the city can do about it."

"Well, it helps that we're paying taxes on it, ahead. For one hundred years," Muriel said. "So they aren't out anything in revenue. That softens the blow a lot."

Chapter 26

The Game's Afoot

(Monday afternoon, later – Tuesday afternoon)

"It's on," Taylor said, as they returned. "No problem. A lot of shock, but no problem."

"OK, then I need to finish the transfer," Muriel said.

"Well, actually, you don't. I used the Home card to buy the property, and signed as your agent," Taylor said. "So, it's Home property, now."

"Oh, my! So you double bluffed them."

"Yep. Oh, and the taxes are paid, too. Same way," Taylor said. "It saved on paperwork all the way around. And made it obvious that this was Home territory."

And, as they were talking, Greene went over to the second sculpture, and just stared at it. "I put it in the right place, didn't I?" asked Muriel.

"What?" Greene responded, absently. "Oh, yes. Perfect. BOTH you. I never realized. And now I understand the piece. Both walking into a future they can't see, but looking back and forward, and grinning. Yes. Definitely you. Thank you."

"No problem. Oh," Muriel added, "I put up the plaques so people would know what they are." And Greene went to Taylors.

"Yes. Definitely 'to the front'. It used to be a race to just try to keep up with him. I think it still is," Greene said. "And you, too. You're as fast as he is."

"She's faster," Taylor said.

"Are you calling me a fast woman?" asked Muriel, throwing in the innuendo.

"Of course. But not loose," Taylor said, jabbing back. And Muriel hit him. "Seriously, I HAD to learn to be fast, just to keep up with her. Carla," he said, quickly changing the subject before he got skewered, "the place is your's to design. Any time you want to start."

"OK, Greene, how do you feel about beams and whitewashed walls behind your pictures?" asked Carla.

"You can do that?" he asked.

"Oh, you'd be surprised what I can do," she said. "Yea, I can give it quite an effect, while lending it an Irish atmosphere. If you don't mind, that is."

"Can I ask for changes if I don't like it?" he asked, and Carla laughed.

"Of course. But before we get to that point, you'll KNOW what it will look like," and she proceeded to create a three dimensional model of the restaurant, and show him how it would be different. They moved a few things around, added a couple of things, and suddenly the whole thing seemed to come together. It had the flavor of a much older building, but still had modern features that set it off.

"How long?" asked Greene, thinking that he'd be out of business for a week.

"Five minutes. Though we should warn your patrons," Carla said. "Especially since this is going to change their tables and chairs, too. They might get a kick out of seeing the whole room remodeled around them."

"YOU tell them. I'd be afraid to," Greene said.

"Done deal," Carla said, then amplified her voice. "Ladies and gentlemen. This property has just been bought by Home, to be part of an Enclave Embassy for Ireland. The building surrounding this restaurant will shortly be remodeled to suit the tastes of the Leader of Home and your new Ambassador. Now, I COULD wait until you've all left, and remodel in here, then. OR . . . I could do it now, so you could see how it's done. It will mean a change to your tables and chairs, but that won't affect you. Really. So, it's up to you. It'll only take about five minutes, and won't cause any mess. How about it. Want to see how an Envoy trained person remodels a room?" And she got a resounding, positive response in the form of a cheer.

"OK, then. Here it goes. You won't see anything at first, for a minute or so. Then the change will happen," Carla said, and went to the center of the room. She looked all around it, then closed her eyes. And a hush fell on the restaurant. Then suddenly, DIFFERENT! The floor was heavy wood, almost like beams, but absolutely flat and highly polished. The walls, where you could see them past the pictures, were whitewashed, and wooden columns seemed to grow an inch out of them. The ceiling was the same whitewashed plaster look, with beams jutting an inch down, in between. Tables and chairs appeared to be old and well worn, but again highly polished wood. The lighting LOOKED like candles in wrought iron chandeliers, but were actually electric, and provided a bit more light than had been present before. And a thunderous cheer went up. Then, two spotlights hit each of the sculptures, lighting them in such a way as to make them almost come alive.

"OK, how's that?" Carla asked Greene.

He looked around in amazement. "I didn't really see what you were doing, in the model. This is better than I expected. And all the pictures are still here. Will you be doing the same sort of thing with the rest of the building?" Greene asked.

"Pretty much. Same basic character to the public areas. Rooms won't be as obviously like this. They'll be more bland, and it will be the character of the furniture that will present the 'Irish' look and feel," Carla said. "Actually, the shell and the Ambassador's office will be the

easy part. Where I'll need lots of help is with the rooms. I have to set it up for 'cookie cutter' rooms, suites, and apartments. Then feed that to a bunch of Envoys to actually put them in place. When it's done, it will look structurally sound from the purely human point of view. But the actual structural strength will be in the shell, and the fact that it's all done with shields. It only LOOKS like normal materials. When I get the shell changed, it would be able to take a nuclear attack and not show so much as a scar."

"And that's what you do," Greene said as a statement.

"Yep. That's what I do," Carla grinned.

"Things sure have changed since I retired," Greene mused. "I thought it was something when Muriel created the sculpture of Taylor. But this . . . unbelievable."

"Then, it's a good thing you don't HAVE to believe it. Just do it," Carla said, laughing. "Like anything, it takes education and a will to try something new. Sometimes experiment. But, in the end, it's just a job. And what I get out of it is the challenge of fitting the needs of the client to what I can do with it to make it pretty, or astounding, or just plain functional. When we're done – and it WILL take Envoys to help me – this will be a distinctive building with a purpose. And your restaurant is a major attraction in that purpose."

"And it would take two days to do it?" Greene asked.

"Oh, I could probably complete it in what would be your evening. Seven hour difference between here and America," Carla said. "Jeff would understand if I was late. Especially if I let him know, ahead of time. I've already got the basic design for the building. Two days would be easier on me, though."

"Jeff. Someone special?" asked Greene.

"My consort. Yea, like Muriel and Taylor," Carla said. "No contracts except that we contract with ourselves to care for the other person as well and as long as we can."

"Then take the two days. It won't mater to Anthony. And I'd bet it won't matter to Muriel and Taylor. They're both good people," Greene said. "You DO know that she pushed him, hard, to grow up and get some spine. It surprised the heck out of me to see him stand up to his grandmother and Parliament the way he did. But some of the things that he's done since then were flabbergasting. Definitely showed Muriel's hand in them. But not leading him. He used her to foster HIS agenda, and she used him the same way. They make a tough pair."

"What surprises me, Mata, and a few others is how she does it. It seems like she can't go anywhere without finding someone to train, or to make an Ambassador, or both," Carla said with a smile. "She's infectious, that way. It isn't QUITE running right over the top of them, except where they're about to break through on their own, and she lets them know the consequences of NOT being in control of it. Well, I should go. I've got a hot lunch date," she said, grinning, "and I'd like to take the time to be ready for it. I'll be back about noon

tomorrow, your time. Then you can watch the fir fly as the rest of the building is finished.”

Greene smiled back. “By all means, make your date.”

Carla was as good as her word. Tuesday noon found a crowd of people outside the building. Then suddenly they were gone. Greene rushed outside in time to see the whole front of the building change. And the theme from inside was matched, outside. Only now, you could see that the beams were meant to be functional as well as decorative, and provided the strength of the whitewashed walls. The second floor extended out over the sidewalk, some. And two floors above that was where the roof began – red tile. It was Tudor style, basically, but modified to make it look and feel VERY Irish.

Hopkins came up beside Greene, and laughed. “Only she could get away with something ENGLISH in the middle of Belfast,” he said. “But it looks like an old Irish pub and inn. I wondered if that was what she was going to do when I saw the inside of your restaurant. Remarkable woman.”

“That she is,” Greene said. “And, unfortunately for me, consorted.” And Hopkins laughed again.

“Ever notice how the Enclaves don't seem to have any alcoholic beverages?” asked Hopkins.

“Nope. I know for fact that the American one has restaurants with them. So does the British Enclave. And others. What they don't have are bars,” Greene said. “I don't think they're against drinking. I think they're against drinking being the only purpose to life.”

“You could be right, there. Come to think of it, YOU offer alcoholic drinks,” Hopkins said.

“Yep. Mostly beer and wine. And not much of wine,” Greene said. “It's usually those from outside the country that go for the wine. I think I've only sold five hard drinks in the past year. And those to Americans.”

“Well, it looks like Carla wants me. Greene, what you've done for me . . . ,” Hopkins started.

“Don't. I don't do it just for you, or even for the others. At least part of it is for me,” Greene said. “I have trouble seeing people that need a hand being ignored. And it doesn't cost me anything to help them out. Or you. So, don't feel obligated. And DON'T be a stranger. I like your company. I like your intelligence. I expect you in my restaurant AT LEAST as often as you have been. And if you're not, well, I know where to find you, now.” And Hopkins laughed, and headed for Carla.

“Hi, Anthony,” Carla said. “I'd like your input on your office and apartment. Which would you like to do, first?”

"Well, my apartment really doesn't matter, too much. I'm renting a furnished, so all there is is my personal things. Clothes, books, CDs, some papers. That's about it. Even the entertainment center was part of the apartment furnishings."

"OK, we'll cover all that, later. Let's go to your office. This is built around the basic design that Muriel and her crew came up with, nine years ago," Carla said, "and it's proved pretty successful at how flexible it is. And I mean, really! So feel free to make whatever suggestions or requests you wish."

And they stepped in. On the left was the outside world and his casual area fronting his desk and chair. Directly ahead was a less intimidating desk, and on the right, facing the glass wall that looked out on the entryway to the Guest House, were five more desks. Behind his desk was a wall with shelving and a blank area.

"The blank area is to hold your certificates," Carla said, noting his curious look. "Whatever you had before, of course, as well as any new ones that Betty or your security chief give you. Or, I guess, one of your squads may be 'education', too. The shelving is primarily for knick-knacks. Whatever you'd like to have up there. Like that sculpture of Muriel and Taylor. Don't worry about it, I figure in a month it'll be full."

Behind all that was a tremendous room that seemed to be set crosswise. And it was filled with recliners. And people. And six of them seemed to be moving toward him.

"Good morning, sir. My name is Barry, and I'm to be your security chief," the first said, as the other five took places at the desks. "To start with, I'll be acting as go-between for you and your squads. As you get to know them, you'll be able to interact directly. Well, Muriel will go over all that with you, when she shows up, I'm sure. You have four squads, and they have specific specialties as well as general functions. For example, like Muriel's, squad one is your diplomats. Squad two is housekeeping and meals. Squad three are your attack dogs. And squad four is education. However, ANY of them – or all of them – can go with you as security when you go out. I know this is all new to you, and I'm probably throwing too much at you at once. So just ask whatever questions you have at any time. Of any of us. Oh, we're all Envoys, so if you'd like a different mix of apparent genders, just let us know. It's nothing for us to change."

"You said one squad was housekeeping? You mean that I'm supposed to expect a squad to pick up after me?" asked Anthony.

"That, and cleaning, and making sure things are running right, like plumbing and such, and cooking and providing snacks. Really, sir," Barry said, "just think of us as the ultimate servants."

"They're more than just that," Carla interrupted. "As you get to know them, they become friends that you can trust, interact with, and even get told off by if you're headed in a wrong direction." And she grinned. "Concentrate on Barry, to begin with. The rest will just be background, then. And as time goes on and you watch them in action, you'll interact with them, more and more. Now, the break room is where they'll ALL be, when you're here. They

may stay here when you're not, like when you're in your apartment or out eating. Muriel discovered that Envoys don't sleep, but do benefit from down time."

"I notice that they're all in what looks like a gray uniform. Am I expected to wear a uniform?" asked Anthony.

"Oh, no sir. What you wear, and what we wear, is entirely up to you. This is what you might call the default clothing that Envoys use when interacting with humans," Barry said.

"Oh, my! I'm not sure what to do with all of you," Anthony said. "I've never had employees, before."

"Well, Mata – that's Muriel's security chief – told us that you were a teacher. And one of your functions is to teach others the Envoy techniques, and help them to get the add-ons and other courses that they might need. So, in a sense, you've been upgraded from just a teacher to an advisor."

"Hmm. Yes, that does make it easier to get a handle on," Anthony said.

"You're boggling," Muriel said from behind him. "Don't. They'll run the place, and you'll get used to it as you go along. Barry knows what to do, and what to alert you to. Anything you DON'T know how to do, you contact me and I'll take care of it, either by dealing with it, or by showing YOU how to deal with it. Mostly, the latter. For now, just take things one step at a time. Oh, heck! Now I'M boggling you. Just relax. One thing at a time, and you'll find your place. This isn't like a regular job, where you have to come into it knowing everything, or being able to bluff your way through. OK?"

"No. I feel like I'm drowning!" Anthony said.

"Then imagine how it was for a twelve year old girl when she's told to design her office and apartment," Muriel said, laughing. "That was just after being insulted by a most offensive man from the State Department who was SUPPOSED to give me my Ambassador credentials for America. I decked him."

"You WHAT?"

"I knocked him down on the ground and retrieved the papers from him by pulling them out of a 'no pocket'. And suddenly, I was an Ambassador. And for the next nine years I was operating at a dead run, trying to stay ahead of the bullies," Muriel said. "The biggest and most important thing you have is your reaction to others. People have tried to figure out what my personality was from one or two episodes. They can't. The ONLY way to figure me out is to accept ALL episodes as valid."

"Wait a minute! I think I finally begin to understand," Anthony said. "You're saying that I'm not so much learning my job as learning about me!"

"Yep. Pretty much. Just, whatever comes, you deal with it," Muriel said. "I had four

squads and Ted to back me up and help me out. You've got a LOT more than that. You've got me and my squads, Ted and his, all the other Ambassadors, INCLUDING Taylor. By the way, you outrank him. You're an Ambassador from a world. He's only a King of a nation or realm. And yes, he's also an Ambassador, but only as a liaison. Feeling better, now?"

"I'm beginning to see how big this is, anyway," Anthony said. "This isn't a job, it's a . . . I don't know how to phrase it."

"It's a point of view. Does something cause harm to another? Can you fix it?" Muriel said. "In particular, is harm being caused to the People or Citizens of Home? THAT'S your job. Trying to make things better. Through training. Through education. Through interfacing with whatever government level. Through finding the bribes, threats, collusion, corruption that are driving the harm caused to them. And you don't have to stop with just the Envoys and Envoy trained humans. Toby, in Scotland, is going after the poor and dispossessed, and trying to help them."

"OK, NOW I begin to understand."

"Good. Now, is the office all right for you?" asked Muriel.

"For now. Let me see how it works, and I may make suggestions or requests," Anthony said, more positively. "I'm going to have to feel my way through this a bit, first."

"Good. So, let's look at your apartment," Carla said.

Chapter 27

The Foot's A Game

(Tuesday afternoon, later)

"OK," Carla said, as they translated to his apartment, "this is the living room. Or maybe you'd call it a sitting room. Where you could bring guests that you don't necessarily want to see how you live. Think of it like a personal version of the casual area of your office. Any furniture you want changed or re-arranged, let us know. We want you to be comfortable, and I didn't have time to find out what you liked."

"OK, can I stop you here?" Anthony said.

"Of course," Carla replied.

"Flower patterned couch – that's got to go. I don't mind heavy furniture, but putting flowers on it is just too much," Anthony said. "There is a type of furniture that is heavy wood with leather cushions. Problem is, the cushions kept sliding. But something LIKE that, but without that problem is more me."

"Good!" Carla said. "That tells me more of what you like. And I think I know what you want. We'll start with the couch. How's this?" she asked, and the flowers disappeared, and what looked like polished hickory took its place, with dark leather upholstered seat and back as all one unit and attached to the frame.

"Oh, now that's nice," Anthony said.

"Oh, excellent. Now give me a minute, because I'm matching the style throughout the apartment." And suddenly the whole living room changed, and its very nature was different. A closer look showed that one of the chairs was actually a recliner. "I did the same for your casual area, downstairs, too," Carla said. "I hope that was all right."

"Oh, definitely. This is the type of furniture that will hold up forever," Anthony said. "And I know, because a club I used to belong to had it, and they'd bought it new over a hundred years ago. Definitely serviceable."

"Then we'll make the change throughout your office as well as your apartment," Carla said. "And no, it doesn't bother me to do that. My goal is ALWAYS to give the client what he wants and needs. And that includes comfort and image. You've just given me both, thank you. There may be some other things to change for you, but I think they will be minor, now." And she led them to the entertainment area. From here, back, the only lighting was from fixtures. The only windows were in the front.

"Carla, can I ask you to put a wall between the living area and here? I see why you separated them. But it's possible that I might have a number of friends up, and some would be talking together, and others would be in here, dancing or watching movies, or something,"

Anthony said.

"Of course. I'll leave an archway, but I'll show you how to set a shield so that one side doesn't disturb the other. And, since you might have friends over to watch movies, I'm going to change the furniture in here to recliners, and stagger them in two rows, with the second row up a bit," she said, doing it at the same time, as well as adding ramps and railing on each side.

"A miniature theater! Outstanding!" Anthony said.

"Will you need more seats? Or a larger screen?" Carla asked. "Or I could even reorient it, instead of across the axis of the apartment I could put it long ways, and extend the apartment back a bit. Add more chairs."

"No, this is fine. I shouldn't have more people than there are chairs, here," Anthony said. "OH! And you've got cup holders built right into the arms of the chairs. This really is outstanding."

"Wait until you hear the sound system," Carla grinned. "You'll think you're IN a theater. Hmm. Would you want a curtain?"

"Now that would be overkill," Anthony said, laughing. "No, I think we'll leave it the way it is. If I HAVE to go to that much trouble to impress someone, I'll ask you how to set one up."

"Or just ask Barry. He'll have the basic skills for something like this. Or he may have passed it to your housekeeping squad. Probably that," Carla said. "Security chiefs are all in competition with each other. Oh, nothing malicious. Kind of a friendly rivalry. And they all start with the way Mata does it for Muriel. Bart, Ted's security chief, was the exception, and even HE'S come over to her way of doing it. It's one of the reasons that the squads are now sectioned by general task that they do. And Mata and Muriel's squads managed to keep THAT piece of information from her for NINE YEARS! It isn't because Muriel's dense, or anything"

"You'd BETTER say that I'm not dense," Muriel said.

And Carla laughed, then said, "It's because the squads can all pretty much do anything. It's just that some squads excel in one way or another, and that's how it shook out. Now, they all do it."

"Anna caught on right away. But she examines EVERYTHING, anyway," Muriel said.

"Now, the walls are all actually shields on the surface. You tell a wall that you want a different color, it'll do it. You tell a wall that you want a country scene instead and it can do it. Really. They're actually computers of a limited sort," Carla said. "One of the things that Jeff found out about shields. Oh, and they giggle when they feel appreciated. So, if you collapse into a chair and say, 'oh that feels good', you may hear a giggle from the chair. That's how I can change furniture so quickly. Or walls. Or lots of things. Clothes, for instance. All

shields. And they WANT you to be comfortable.”

“Anthony,” Carla went on, “you said you had books. Would you like a library or office up here? Or would you like bookshelves in here? We could build them right into the walls. How many books do you have?”

“Quite a few. Many in storage. If they aren’t ruined,” Anthony said, sadly.

“What are the locations of the storage and your apartment?” asked Muriel. And Anthony told her. A minute later, the walls held custom built bookcases, and four squads were indexing books and putting them on the shelves. It took about five minutes, and then it looked like they’d always been there.

Before they could escape, Anthony said, “Barry – all of you people – thank you. That was over and above what you should be doing.”

“Then you’re thinking small, sir. This is our job,” Barry said. “We are here to serve you, in whatever way we can. And no, it’s not demeaning to us. There are times when we need to be official and do things as part of the Embassy. But there are also times when we can just do things for a friend. And you’re a friend.” Barry smiled, and the massed squads translated out.

“Oh, my. I’ve got Envoys as friends. WHAT did I do to deserve this?” he asked.

“You said you’d be an Ambassador to the people of Ireland,” Muriel said. “And that’s a big deal to them. It means that you’ll be putting yourself between those that need help, and those that would put them down. It means being a nurturer as well as a protector, and trying to find those that need help and doing something about it. And humans are the Children of Home. You were a teacher, and that’s a form of nurturing. And you tried to protect your students from what society said, not by hiding it, but by helping them to understand what was being said and why.”

“But . . . that’s why I was fired!” he said.

“But . . . they fired you because you were telling your students the truth, and they didn’t want the truth out,” Muriel said. “And these Envoys – these friends – are here to help you do that. Get the truth out, and help protect the Children of Home. Help them become Citizens.”

“You know? That makes sense,” Anthony said. “OK, let’s see the rest of the apartment.”

“OK, next is the kitchen and dining room. You may have to fight your housekeeping crew to use either this kitchen or the one in the break room. Oh, by the way. The only way in and out is by translation. And, after we leave, only those on your list are allowed in, except in emergency,” Carla said. “In an emergency, ANY of your security force can get in. But Home help them if it isn’t an emergency. Normally, the list is a short one. Your security chief, if necessary. Your housekeeping crew when you’re not here, or to make meals. You can

over-ride to ask someone to come up, or you can BRING people up. That's it. It makes this apartment one of the safest places in the world."

"So, they aren't going to let me cook?" asked Anthony.

"Probably not. Oh, they'll teach you Envoy techniques of cooking, if you want to learn. But then you'd have to fight them for the opportunity," Muriel said. "About the only thing I'm allowed to make is coffee, and only if it's in a mug. They don't trust me with anything else," she added, grinning. And Anthony laughed.

"Now, short hall, and the reason is for your bathroom. Tub, shower – the tub will act as a hot tub, if you like. And if you haven't learned the fast way to dry off, ask Barry," Carla said.

"And last, your bedroom," Carla said. Anthony looked. And it was huge. It had to be, because of the bed and dresser that were in it. The bed could easily have held four without any conflict, and was of the same polished hickory. There appeared to be windows in the room, until he took another look and realized that they were actually screens that gave a view of the outside without letting on that there was even a room here to those outside. "The apartment can be expanded, some, too, should it ever be necessary," Carla added.

"Expanded. Wow. Carla, this is huge – far more than I expected," he said.

"Well, a bit spartan, maybe," Carla said, "So let me know if there's something else you need. Oh, those screens can give you a view of anyplace, not just what's right outside. So, you can change your view whenever you want."

"OH! By the way, this goes with the office and apartment," Muriel said, handing him a credit card. "Your first month's salary is already in the bank, and these are recognized everywhere that I know of."

"First month's . . . ?"

"Of course. It's a JOB, Anthony. That means you get paid," Muriel said. "Anything that's needed for your job, and I DO mean anything because we can't anticipate where your job will take you, gets paid out of your office funds. Translation, Barry lets us know the price and we pay it. Ninety-nine percent of the time, anything that you need, OR WANT, can be made or supplied by Home, so it won't cost you a thing. And we want to know about the one percent you actually have to pay for. Because there may be a way we can supply that, too."

"But . . . if that's true, then why do I get a salary?" asked Anthony.

"Because it's a job. And employees get paid," Muriel said. "Because there ARE some things that you can't do by simply making something or getting it from Home. I've got nine years of salary that I've never touched. The INTEREST on it I sometimes touch. Like buying land and putting up a building for those that are out on the street. Or getting doctors in Envoy style medicine set up in offices all over London, and now Britain, where people can go and actually be cured of whatever is bothering them. And many times, those doctors don't even

see their patients in their office. They go OUT to where the patient is.”

“But, that's got to be a whopping amount. How can you pay for it just out of your salary?” asked Anthony. And Muriel handed him a piece of paper with a number on it.

“Home doesn't have a cash economy,” Muriel said. “So, they can afford to hire people at much more than they can get in the human society.” And Anthony was stunned. The figure was nearly as much as what he made in a year as a college professor. “Oh, that's AFTER the taxes have been paid on it. You might say that you're 'comfortably well off' now,” she added, laughing. “Let's go back downstairs, so you can get to know your security squads.”

Back in his office, Greene was just staring, first at one area then at another, and his mouth was hanging open. “Well, Greene?” asked Muriel.

“First you turn My world upside down. Then you turn my friend's world upside down,” he said. “This is unreal! And so fast!”

“It's her fault,” Carla said. “We have to be fast, just to keep up with her,” she added, pointing to Muriel. “Seriously, this was nothing. Just a building. And most of it we could use, at least for shape. So it was just going through and making a few improvements.”

“A few . . . improvements And I was wondering how I was going to make next month's payroll,” Greene said. “What's the rent going to be?”

“Nothing. You're now part of the Irish Enclave. Oh, the restaurant is your's. You run it, and the profits are yours. But this makes it possible for you to do what you were doing, anyway. Feeding those that are trained for free. And maybe a few other things that you were doing,” Muriel said. “We're your landlord, so if there's a problem with your restaurant, or even something you want changed, you let us know and we cover it. Simple.”

Meanwhile, Anthony was looking around, and noticed something on the shelves behind his desk. And there it was. Muriel and Taylor, walking into the future, standing on one end of the shelves. “The others are in the gift shop. But you expressed an interest in this one, so we had it put up,” Barry said. And Anthony just looked at him. “No, it's not really mind reading. You were radiating when you watched Muriel recreate the sculpture of Muriel and Muriel in Greene's restaurant. All the Envoys of Home – and that's a LOT of Envoys – have watched that little girl grow up into the woman she is. And she still has that devilish grin, like she's about to get into trouble. She does have fun with her job.”

“There are students that I used to teach. I dread what they're getting now for information,” Anthony said, reflectively.

“And now, there's a place you can bring them to, and teach them more,” Barry said. “That's why the living room in your apartment. Why the large theater style entertainment room,” Barry said. “Oh, we can show you how to set up a blackboard. Or maybe white board, for giving instruction in the theater. We can even show you how to make the chairs into desks for them. Evenings and weekends, you can show them the realities that the

university sloughs over. Show them where the lies in society are, and teach them how to think.”

“You’re telling me that my job is to go back to teaching,” Anthony said.

“Yes. Maybe. In a way. Oh, there’s a lot more that you’ll do, too,” Barry said. “And no, that’s not predicting the future, really. It’s just that we’ve seen what other Ambassadors have done, and it’s NEVER just one thing. You’ll learn new things as you go along, simply because that’s the way the job runs. You’ll see a problem and try to fix it. And we’ll help. There’s connections between all the Ambassadors. One they may not realize, even when they’re told. It’s through the security chiefs. We know what’s going on in other areas of the world, and can figure out how they may affect the area we’re in. Sometimes, it means that we can stop a problem even before it starts.”

“What do you need us for, then?” asked Anthony.

“You are the ones that know HOW to stop the problems. Sometimes, you’re the ones that even realize that a problem exists,” Barry said. “Envoys were static. For thousands of years – maybe millions – we were held static. Humans were supposed to be the way we broke out of it. But we were even kept away from you. So, we stagnated. Then Ted and Muriel came along and turned OUR world upside down. And we realized what we’d been missing. You are creative. You are inventive. And, slowly, you’re teaching us to look beyond the expected, the traditional, the ordinary. But we’re still learning from you. SO much to learn. You see relationships where we only see questions. That’s what we need you for. To be OUR teachers.”

“OH!” Anthony said.

“Yea. ‘Oh’,” Barry grinned. “It isn’t just us teaching you our techniques – the ones you SHOULD have had as you grew up. It’s you teaching us how to be human, and be creative. How to judge good and evil. How to actually help others. SO much you have to teach us, and every event is different, in some way. And you meet them differently. Because the events are different, or because each of YOU are different and see different approaches to how to do things.”

“I see a trap there,” Anthony said. “If you’re trying to categorize and analyze how we do it, then you’ll be forever caught in the past instead of addressing the future. The trick is to see the possibilities, not what was done in the past and try to replicate it.”

“THAT’S why we need you,” Barry said. “So, teach us. And we’ll teach others. Other Envoys. Other humans. Bring your students here, and let us watch how you teach them to look beyond themselves.”

“There’s a way,” Muriel said. “One that Mata beat me up over, years ago, because I didn’t have the sense to see it. Barry should be with you, where-ever you go, whatever you do. Oh, not necessarily private things,” she added, smiling, “but the everyday things. That’s one. Mata says that where-ever I am is where the fun is happening. The other thing is to

make a deep link with Barry, so he can see what you need, and you can get a better idea of what he needs. Think about that second. It can help both of you."

And Anthony looked at Barry. "It may be too early, sir. You don't know me, yet. You don't know that you can trust me to be discrete. That I won't really pry into private things. That I won't try to take over from you. We need to learn to work as a team," Barry said.

"No. That only puts it off. OK, Barry, how do we do this?" Anthony asked. It was a tense ten minutes. They found seats, and just looked at each other. But behind that a LOT was happening. And at the end of it, they were both laughing. "OK," Anthony said. "I see what you mean. Yes, we can do this. We WILL do this. I was beginning to feel that I'd walked into something WAY over my head. But it isn't, really. It's just being me. And I'm more than the equal of anyone I meet, now."

"Yep. That's about it," Muriel said. And the devilish grin was back on her face.

Chapter 28

Clothing Allowance

(Wednesday morning)

“Good morning, Anthony,” Barry said, as Anthony translated into his office. “Sleep well?”

“I think so. I'm not sure. I was asleep,” Anthony quipped back, and Barry laughed. “I've got a question for you. You and the squads are all wearing something like a gray uniform. You said that that was the 'default' look. Does that mean that you can change it?”

“Of course. Each Ambassador has determined his or her own 'image' to project. Some are outlandish. Some are quasi-military, like Muriel. Some are cultural past, like Li Chun in China or Anastasiya Khmelnytsky in Russia. Some are just 'different', like Taylor when he led the Regiment of Home and was the Ambassador to Britain. But others are more subtle. It all depends on what you want to project, and what your self image is. Toby, in Scotland, chose to be quasi-military, but on the attack, his squads look like hulking highland Scots. The rest of the time, they wear subdued versions of the military uniforms that Muriel and Carla first concocted. We've just been waiting for you to decide how you wanted to look.”

“How I . . . but wouldn't it take time to make all those clothes?” asked Anthony.

“Oh, my. I detect a lack of training. Well, there were bound to be gaps in the wild training. This is easily taken care of,” Barry said. “Mike, did we ever get the clothing shops set up?”

“Nope. But I can help. Oh, they might be improved once the shops ARE set up. Mata's having some trouble finding Envoys that want to do clothing. It isn't that there are so few that want to. It's that there's so MANY that want to,” one of the squad members said. “No problem. I spent last night talking with one of the ones in the American Enclave. I can do male clothing, easily. And Megan can do woman's just as easily.”

“OK, I want you to help me with Anthony. We'll teach him how to MAKE clothes, and he can see what image he wants to present,” Barry said. “Upstairs, in his theater, I think. That way we have room and privacy. Is that all right with you, Anthony?”

“Yea, sure. Make clothes?” Anthony asked.

“Trust me, you'll love it,” Barry grinned. And they translated to his theater. And fun it was. Anthony was laughing all the way through it, after the initial shock of having to take off his clothes. First up was what he was used to. 'Professional' clothes for a professor. Slacks, shirt and jacket or sweater. Then they tried various formal wear. Anthony stored the ideas, but he didn't really like the look. And kilts were out. Then Mike made some suggestions, and 'the look' came together. NOT rich. NOT prosperous. Just 'college professor' for the everyday look. The squads opted for a bit more casual – sweaters instead of jackets, for

example. Much like associate professors might do. Then, they finally came up with a 'formal' look that Anthony could accept. Dark colors, but more Irish look, by using the 'squared away' look that was part of history. Nothing flamboyant, but by the same token, something distinctive. And when Anthony and the two Envoys went back downstairs, it was to a sea of colors and shades. And grins. And a guest.

"Hello. Can I help you?" asked Anthony.

"Maybe we can help each other," the man said. "My name is Tommy, and yes, I'm an Ambassador, despite the red tunic. I'm part of the Home Rescue and Recovery unit, based in London, now, but I'm also a professor. My specialty is Philosophy. I don't go by Thomas, because people would think I doubted them." And Anthony laughed.

"I can see that we'll get along, famously," Anthony said. "So, how will we help each other?"

"I can give you the philosophy background, as well as what I developed, myself. You can give me the literature side of it, and what you noticed from it, and how you use it," Tommy said. "I think you may be on to something. And I'm not sure how far it will spread, but I'd like to find out."

So, Anthony spent an hour trading information with Tommy. Sometimes, actually getting his 'education' squad involved with creating the courses that he taught, including all the things that got him in trouble with the colleges. And sometimes getting the courses that had been developed over time by the Envoys for the University of Home. The end result was three columns of certificates headed by the three degrees that he had already held. And most of them were PhD level certificates from the University of Home.

And Tommy passed the Rescue and Recovery information on to Anthony's 'education' and 'troubleshooter' squads, to pass on to police and fire trainees, as well as all the courses that Tommy had come up with. He also passed his experiences as an Ambassador to Anthony, so he could get an idea of just how broad the job was. And in it, he included the time, at the age of twelve, when he first got his own office, and Muriel came in to see him with a pipe in his mouth. And he blew bubbles out of it. Betty showed up, partway through, and delivered the Law degrees to Anthony, including the Irish law and how it differed from British law. And Anthony began to understand that Muriel wasn't kidding. He'd get all the training he needed for the job, and would probably be feeding back into the mass of information with his own experiences.

Betty had left, and Tommy was still there when Ross, Ryan and Muriel showed up. Then it was a whirlwind of training Ross and Ryan – mostly filling in gaps in their training, really, and passing on the courses and information that they'd need, including the Rescue and Recovery course. In the process, Anthony gained more experience in some of the techniques, including translating, and began to learn how to train others in Envoy techniques. And he realized that he'd always have someone at his back to help monitor HIM, as well as who he was training. And that made him feel more comfortable. He also learned how to create the passports and pass them out.

"Feeling better, now?" asked Muriel.

"Yes, actually. I thought this was going to be a major job, and I feared it," Anthony said. "Instead, I find that it's fun. JOY! Just playing games with people, getting them to learn new things. I've always felt that education should actually engage the student. I never realized to what degree that can be taken." And Muriel laughed.

"Yea, it's a kick," she said. "It's the one thing I keep coming back to, and that I feel is the most important part of what I do. And the look on trainees faces when they realize what they can do is like the greatest prank that I could pull on anyone."

"You must have been a little hellion," Anthony said.

"Yea. Mostly with my friends," Muriel said. "But then I got trained, and it ALL came out. Some of the stuff I've done was WAY over the top. My lawyer once told me that 'good news like me travels fast'. What she was saying was that I was bad news."

"'Good news like you'. And you were bad news," Anthony said. "Yea, I can appreciate that. Except that you WERE good news. Just not for the people you opposed."

"You got that right. There's still a bunch of them in jail from the FIRST attacks I pulled," Muriel said. "And they'll stay there. No parole," she added, grimly. "People like that shouldn't have been allowed to live past the age of ten, when their 'interests' first became apparent."

"That's rather judgmental," Anthony said. "Whatever happened to 'judge not, for fear that you'd be judged'?"

"I'm human. I judge. And I judge myself as well as others. I judge myself to see if I'm causing harm, even before I act. And I judge others by the harm they do. OR the good they do. Your little statement was a lie from the beginning. One created by those who wanted control over the 'sheep', and wanted to do the judging, themselves," Muriel said. "Wanted to be able to throw guilt around as a control on their 'flock', so they could fleece them. Yea, I'm human. I'm capable of a lot of things that society has constantly told us are wrong, because it's not the people in charge that are doing it. I'm an omnivore, which means that, somewhere along the line I'm responsible for killing. And I'm human, and in contest with others, which means that I'm capable of killing. Or at least capable of causing the death of others. But I'm also Envoy, which means that I'm a protector and nurturer. I don't HAVE to kill, except in extreme situations. But I do have to teach. It's like food. Or breathing."

"I'm beginning to see what you're like," Anthony said. "There's some of it that you don't like doing."

"Of course there is. Some of it is downright nasty. But sometimes it needs to be done," Muriel said.

"Then why do it?" asked Anthony.

"It needs to be done, to protect the innocent," Muriel said. "By the way, sometimes it helps to be outrageous. And I can show you one way that is REALLY outrageous, if you'd like. It DOES require some room, though," she added. "And you may not want it to be shown in public unless and until you feel you need to."

"So, not on the sidewalk," Anthony mused. "How about my theater?"

"Good. Let's go!" Muriel said, grinning.

"I'm in trouble, now," Anthony laughed, translating them up to his apartment, then turned to Muriel and gasped. "WINGS!"

"Yep. And you can do it, too. Ask your soul," Muriel said, and resumed her normal appearance.

Anthony dug down, deep, and asked his soul about wings, and suddenly they were there. Huge. And NOT like raptor wings. "What ARE they?" he asked.

"Owl," Muriel said, looking at them. "Wait . . . Long Eared Owl!" she added as she got the image from the mesh mind in Home. "Well, owls were thought to be the bearers of knowledge and wisdom, if I remember right. Now, for the really outrageous part. You can turn your suit white. The wings should match. Then push your power level up and you should glow." He did, and the effect was definitely outrageous, as he saw when Muriel created a mirror for him.

"O-K! NOW I see how you get to be so outrageous. And that's how you did that building, too, isn't it," Anthony said.

"Well, the sculpture inside it. Carla did the building, first. And from a number of different images to give her the idea," Muriel said.

"Well, I can see why you didn't want to do this in the street. You'd have panicked people," Anthony grinned. "Well, we'd better get back down before someone thinks something indecent."

"Do you REALLY think that a trained woman could be forced? I threw two men across the room in opposite directions, one time, when I was sixteen," Muriel said. "And that was just for grabbing me. Knocked them out. But, maybe your right. We ought to save YOUR reputation," she said, grinning. And they translated back to his office, laughing.

They were sitting in Anthony's casual area, telling Barry about what they'd done when Anthony noted three young adults looking at the front doors to the building. "Oh, oh. Folks, there's trouble coming. I may need to do a passel of explaining in a bit. Barry, bring them in, would you, please?" And a moment later, three very astonished young people were 'eyes everywhere' looking around them. And Muriel, with that devilish look on her face, stood up and switched to formals.

"Good morning. Welcome to the Embassy of Home in Ireland. My name is Muriel. How can we help you?" she asked, partly eclipsing Anthony with her body.

"This is really an Embassy?" asked a girl, only to get nudged by another.

"Silly, she SAID it was. Plus, THAT'S HER! THE Muriel. The Leader of Home," the second girl said.

"Come in. Have a seat. We were just chatting. Nothing important. You look puzzled," Muriel said. And slowly the three were coaxed into seats. Then Muriel took one of her own. And that did it.

"PROFESSOR HOPKINS!" the boy said. "Where have you been?"

"Aren't you three supposed to be in class?" he asked, not answering the question, directly.

"Yea. Last of the morning. Well, last of the day, really," the boy said. "But it got canceled. The instructor's sick. How come you're not teaching, anymore?"

"I was fired. It seems that the academic council didn't want students to actually think," Hopkins said. "And certainly not about what was wrong with society. So, I was living on my savings. Then I got a job."

"What are you doing, now, then?" the boy persisted.

"Well, considering that we're in the Embassy of a whole other world, and Muriel actually lives in Britain with the King, what do you think I'm doing?" Anthony asked. And the boy shook his head.

"Sean, you're not usually that slow. Or is it that you don't remember my name, despite the kidding I got at the start of the year about having the same name as a famous actor from Wales?" Anthony asked.

And he watched one of the girls light up in surprise. "YOU? YOU'RE Ambassador Anthony?"

"Yes," Anthony said, simply but gently. "Very good, Nicole. Now, what can you tell me about Home?"

"Nothing. I've never been there," she said. "So, what do you do, now? I mean, what does an Ambassador do?"

"Well, as it's been described to me, whatever he can. Or she can. In my case, I think it will be principally teaching young dunderheads to think about the world, and what's wrong with it, and what it would take to make it right. So, what brought you out here?" he asked.

“Sean. He said something had happened, here, yesterday afternoon, so, since we had the time off, we thought we'd come find out about it,” Nicole said.

“Ah. You didn't manufacture your instructor's illness, did you? Jalapeño juice in his 'energy drink' or something?” Anthony asked.

“NO! How could you think of such a thing! That would be horrible,” Nicole said. “But now that you mention it, it might pay him back for not seeing the obvious fallacy in what he was telling us, Monday,” she said, in disgust. And Muriel choked, trying to keep from laughing.

“Well, it's nearly my lunch time. And, if I remember my youth, you are all probably hungry. So, why don't we all take lunch together. My treat, of course. I DO remember that part of my starving student days,” Anthony said. “Muriel, would you join us?”

“Well, I was going to go back to Britain. But after Nicole's little remark, maybe I'd better stay here,” Muriel said. “After all, there IS the eleventh commandment to consider. Though we may have company. Do you think Greene would have trouble putting two tables together?”

“Eleventh commandment?” the other girl asked.

“Yea, Shannon. The one you keep forgetting,” Nicole said. “ 'Don't get caught!' “ And the laughing group trooped around the corner to the entrance of Greene's.

Chapter 29

Lunch and Talk (Wednesday afternoon)

Greene was waiting for them as they walked through the door. “Ah, my friend, Anthony. And Muriel! Welcome. And who are these with eyes all over the room? Sean, I know. He comes in from time to time to mooch a meal off me, when his funds are running low.” Which got giggles from the girls. “And Nicole and Shannon, who pay their bill and his by being delightful and well behaved company. This way. Will there be more?”

“Just one, Greene,” Muriel grinned. “He should be along in a moment. He was just finishing something up.”

“OH! Good. Then Anthony, I think we should put you by Sean. You CAN keep him out of trouble can't you? Muriel, why don't you take that end. I'm sure your guest can manage at the other end,” Greene said, conspiratorially.

“Hmm. Yes,” Muriel said. “I'm sure he'll behave himself. Or, at least, LIKE himself,” she added, laughing. And, as they were seated a nondescript man in a modern version of an Edwardian suit, in tan, walked up and took the last place. And three young mouths dropped open.

“Sit. Be still. That's an order,” Taylor said, laughing.

“B-B-B-But”

“But nothing, Sean. Kings DO eat, you know. And it's nice to have lunch with one's consort,” Taylor said. “By the way, I don't think you realize it, but the real power is at the other end of the table. She's the Leader of a whole world – a whole universe. And you call her Muriel. So, since I'm only the ruler of a country, you should call me Taylor. At least when we're being casual.”

“Likewise, now that you young troublemakers are out in adult society, you should call me Anthony,” Hopkins said. “Maybe that way I can at least teach you that adults are people too.”

“But”

“So,” Anthony said, “I'm no longer your professor, am I? Then it must be that I'm your friend. And friends aren't formal with each other.”

“Can anyone tell me,” Muriel said, as she ordered one of Greene's special hamburgers, “What the difference is between 'respect' and 'formality'?”

“Aren't they the same?” asked Sean.

"No," Shannon said. "Respect is how you treat people. Formality is just that – an empty form used to show deference."

"Not bad, Shannon. Now, how is it that Taylor knew to be here, and knew to call Sean by name?" asked Muriel.

"I don't know," Shannon said, puzzled.

"Nicole?" And the girl just shook her head. "How about you, Sean."

"It would have had to be some sort of mind reading, or something," Sean said.

"Least hypothesis, Sean," Anthony said. "That's merely guesswork. What do Taylor and Muriel have in common?"

"Well, they're both rulers. Oh, and they both have some sort of training," the boy said.

"Well, first of all, we are NOT both rulers. He is, of course. That's the nature of being a King. But what is my title?" Muriel said, gently.

"You're the Leader of Home. But isn't a Leader the same as a ruler?" asked Sean.

"Are they? Imagine a race. And you're in the lead. Are you ruling those behind you?" asked Muriel.

"Of course not. They're simply following me," he said. "Oh. You're saying that you don't rule, you simply go someplace and everyone else follows you."

"Yes! Exactly. Sometimes because they like the way I'm going, so they follow. And sometimes because they DON'T like the way I'm going, and are trying to catch me to stop me," Muriel said. "Mind you, some of those attempts could have been fatal. Why weren't they?"

"You got some special training," Nicole said, then took a bite. "But what is that training?"

"Well, to start with, it's a number of things. But I think they could be boiled down to power, and the knowledge of how to use it," Anthony said. "Use it to make shields, which can be turned into clothes, or pens, or paper, or food." And he laughed as Nicole suddenly looked suspiciously at her hamburger. "Yes, even the food you're eating. Perfectly nutritious food, and fresher and purer than what you'd get in a fast food restaurant."

"Everything all right, here?" asked Greene, making his rounds of the tables.

"Of course, Greene. Up to your usual standards, and surpassing them, as usual," Taylor said.

"Something more to drink, young lady?" Greene asked, and produced a glass, then filled it with cola as she watched. "And now you know," he said.

"Out of thin air!" Nicole said.

"Well, actually, out of power, turned into a shield with certain characteristics, then further into matter. It's all just a matter of slowing energy down. A lot," Greene said. "You take physics, don't you? What's the formula?"

"Energy is equal to Mass times the square of the speed of light," Nicole answered, dazed.

"Exactly. Energy and Mass – matter – have a direct relationship. Tell me," Greene suddenly shifted gears, "do I treat you deferentially? Or in a friendly way?"

"Well, you're friendly, of course. But that's just because you want us to come back and buy more food. Isn't it?" Nicole asked.

"Is it? I could achieve that by being deferential, surely. Fawning all over my patrons and such. Instead, I try to treat each as a friend, listening to their opinions and respecting them," Greene said.

"What you're saying is that being formal is just a way of trying to get something from somebody else!" Sean said.

"Close," Muriel said. "But often it's used as a weapon. The idea that 'you will conform to my idea of formality, thus giving up your right to respect'," Muriel said. "Especially with what are called 'more powerful' people, THIS is what formality is. So, which would you rather have? Respect? Or formality?"

"Respect," Shannon said, immediately, and the other's nodded agreement. "THAT'S why you do it! You want to meet people as equals, not in some enforced situation where one side is subservient to the other!"

"That's it," Taylor said. "And Muriel's done this since she was twelve. I know. She taught me, without teaching me. Here was this Ambassador that wouldn't defer to a prince. Even my father. Even my grandmother. And that wasn't all she taught me." And Shannon blushed. "She taught me how to find power, how to use it, and how it could be dangerous. Tell me, that sculpture, over there. How is it that the feet of the horse don't touch the ground?"

"You know," Greene said, "there's a code in the horse. Two hooves on the ground, the man died in battle. Three hooves on the ground, he died of wounds sometime later. All four hooves on the ground, he died of natural causes. So, what does NO hooves on the ground mean?"

"Greene, that's an OLD one. I gave my cook and your teacher, Chuck, the answer years ago. It means that the artist was crazy. He agreed. Just before I hit him," Muriel said, and Greene laughed.

"I can just see him doing that, and with a completely dead-pan expression," Greene said. "And his laughing AFTER you hit him. You always were good to the help."

"Well, that's because they were always good to me," Muriel said. "Believe me, in nine years, I learned a LOT from them. Still do. And you young people STILL haven't answered my question. Why aren't any of the horse's feet touching the ground? What holds it up?"

"Was the artist an Envoy?" asked Nicole.

"Nope," Muriel replied.

"It's suspended by invisible strings?" asked Sean.

"Something that big? It would take a lot of strings. And they'd show. So would the fact that it's suspended, because it would rock," Muriel said.

"You're saying that it's one of those shield things that's holding it up, aren't you," Shannon said. "Who DID it? It must have taken quite a bit of time."

"Oh, only about an hour or so, while I was eating," Muriel said.

"You?" exclaimed Shannon.

"Yea, I was trying to keep Taylor focused on me, for the eventual time when I'd catch him," Muriel grinned. And Taylor threw a fork at her, which promptly stuck, tines first, a foot away from her head. "And you, you pretend ruffian, you can just come and get your fork back." He didn't. He just pulled it from a 'no pocket' after attracting the student's attention. And jaws dropped, again.

"Pretty slick, isn't it," Taylor said. "She didn't get hit because she has a personal shield around her. Invisible. But it will stop ANYTHING that would harm her. And I retrieved the fork simply by applying a different set of rules, that allowed me to see it as mine while I was using it. Therefore, I could 'call' it from where-ever it was by simply taking it from a 'no pocket'. And now you know how she could keep the horse off the ground, in full gallop. There's a shield under it that holds it up. It's just that it's invisible."

"Beginning to get the point, my young friends," Anthony said. "These are hard-headed people that have faced all sorts of hazards in their life. They want you to respect them as they respect you. And they do, or they wouldn't have taken the time to show you these things. And how they've survived and done impossible things, like riding ghost horses, is that they've had some training. So have I. So has Greene, here. And no, his first name is NOT Jolly." Which broke up some of the shock, and caused the kids to laugh. "Even this old reprobate renegade Regimental has treated you with respect and friendship. You're in elite

company, but treated no differently than a friend would be treated.”

“How do I find out more about this training?” asked Shannon.

“Oh, now that's an EASY question to answer. You ask someone that's been trained,” Muriel said.

“That's it? But what about the cost? And where do we have to go?” she persisted.

“Well, the cost is free. The Envoys gave it to us, so we give it to others. And as to where, well, you'll have to go all the long distance to some Embassy of Home, unless you can convince an Ambassador to come to you,” Muriel said.

“WAIT A MINUTE! You told us that we were IN an Embassy,” Sean said.

“Quick, isn't he,” Muriel said to Anthony.

“Maybe. We'll see just HOW quick,” Anthony replied, dryly.

“YOU? You can teach us?” asked Sean.

“If you like. And only those that agree. This is something that can't be forced on someone,” Anthony said.

“I'm in,” Nicole said. “I've seen enough to realize what it could mean for a girl to be protected.”

“Me too,” Shannon said. “Seeing that fork stuck in her shield, like that. And she didn't even flinch!”

“Oh, I've had much worse thrown at me,” Muriel said. “Some of it made me VERY angry. One of those times I almost killed a man, but pulled back just in time,” she added, sadly. “That one scared me. Not because of the attack, but because of the underhanded way it was done, and how it affected me. It made me realize that I HAVE to control my temper.”

“Anthony, have you had a chance to pick out some spots around here that would be vacant?” asked Muriel.

“No, not yet. I'll have my people look into it,” he replied.

“Then there's only one thing for it. You kids don't mind a bit of traveling, do you?” asked Taylor.

“Where to?” asked Sean.

“Her office,” Taylor said. “There's lots of places, there, that you can learn to translate in. Greene”

"Don't say it, Taylor. I know the drill. They're trainees. That's enough. Besides, I don't do this for the money," Greene grinned.

"Have I told you, lately, that you're a good man, Greene?" asked Taylor.

"No, and if you did I wouldn't believe it. I'd figure you wanted something from me," Greene laughed. "Go on with you. Just come back and visit some time. It's been too long." And Taylor and Muriel translated the rest to her office. OUTSIDE her office. Might as well give people the full effect, right?

Chapter 30

Whirlwind

(Wednesday afternoon, later)

“YIPE!” Sean said, as the whoosh doors claimed three more victims. “Do they always do that?”

“Yep. Very respectful doors. They get out of the way when someone wants to go in or out,” Muriel laughed.

“Where are we?” asked Shannon.

“Buckingham Palace. Specifically, my office in it. Come on in,” Muriel said.

“Will we get to see some Envoys?” asked Nicole.

“I think that can be arranged,” Muriel said. “Hi, Mata. I’m back,” she singsonged.

“Young lady, how many times have I told you not to go wandering off by yourself,” Mata said, standing up and putting her fists on her hips. “It’s just not safe.”

“For other people, Mata. You keep forgetting to add that part. For other people,” Muriel said, laughing. “Folks, this is my security chief. She’s been with me for nine years, and still thinks that I’m twelve years old. That’s because she’s SOOO much older than me.”

“Now, now. Be respectful. They don’t know you the way I do,” Mata said.

“Mata, these young people were wondering if they could meet some Envoys. Do you think that could be arranged?” asked Muriel.

“Oh, I think that’s a possibility. You kids DO know that almost all Envoys look like men, don’t you?” Mata asked, and Muriel grinned. “Yep. So, when the first Leader of Home asked for someone to help train this monster, it was obviously a man that answered the call. Now, can you see some six hundred million year old man training a twelve year old girl? Well, neither could Ted. So he requested that the trainer be a twelve year old girl. Well, that worked out except for the deception. You see, it was the six hundred million year old man named Matthew that turned into a twelve year old girl,” and Mata changed to a man, then a young girl, “and walked in and said, ‘Hi! I’m Matt . . . uh.’ AND SHE RAN WITH IT. Later, describing Envoys, I made the mistake of telling her that most of us were male. And she quietly and calmly asked me if it was Matt or Matthew. SHE KNEW! Later still, we taught her to make her own clothes. We chased all the ‘male’ Envoys out of the room, and had a field day trying out various styles. And I didn’t think anything of it. Here I am, in the room with a naked twelve year old girl, and it was only AFTERWARD that she reminded me that she knew. Out thought by a twelve year old.” And the kids laughed.

“Envoys,” Muriel said, “Have no gender. They put on bodies made of shields just to appear like us. They’re actually pure energy – well, we call it power. Power that has attained enough connections and cross connections to become self-aware and intelligent. Some people call it soul.” And the connections began.

Taylor, Anthony and Muriel moved the shivering kids to seats, and talked them through it. It was about five minutes before they came out of it. But when it did, the first thing that struck them was that there were only six humans in the room.

“Well, you wanted to meet Envoys. Now you have,” Muriel said. “They’re all Envoys. Those are my security squads and security chief. And yes, she’s my original trainer. She’s stayed female and grown up with me. And I’ve only had to replace one squad leader. Oh, he isn’t gone. He just moved over to a different squad, because he worked so well with the leader of that squad. So, we brought in a new Envoy as a squad member, and moved one of the original members up to squad leader.”

Dessert for their lunch, then, was a whirlwind training of power into shields, into clothing, then translating and finally translating to home. Taylor helped Anthony with teaching Sean how to make clothes, while Muriel grabbed one of Betty’s squad, a female, to help the girls discover the joys of clothes shopping without shopping. And it was all done with humor that had the students eyes lit up and dancing long after they were back in their seats in the casual area. Then it was on to getting the extended basics and the advanced information that they could build on, themselves.

“Now,” Anthony said, when they’d finally settled down some and were enjoying some ice cream confections that Chuck had concocted, “you WILL tell the others where to come for more information, won’t you? I’m no longer restricted to a syllabus, which means that our discussions can be a little more free-form. And, if they haven’t been trained, then maybe we can do something about that, too.”

“Um . . . Mister Hopkins?” Nicol started, and Anthony raised an eyebrow at her. “All right, Anthony. Does that mean that you’ll continue teaching us about what society is doing to us?”

“I see no reason why not. I might even manage to find ways that you can help make changes in the way society affects you. Or in the way you affect it. We’ll see,” he said. “One thing is certain, you’re welcome to stop by my office any time. If I’m out, then the Envoys you see in my office will be happy to help you.”

“Anthony,” Muriel said, “how many students did you have?”

“Oh, about a hundred,” Anthony said. “Or were you asking how many were a part of that special group that used to meet with me because they wanted to learn more, like these three? That would be nineteen. About half of them are trained. They’d meet with me on weekends to go over some of the questions they had that they didn’t feel they could ask in class, because they seemed to go against what the rest of the class’s students thought and believed.”

"Would they all be off, right now?" she persisted.

"What? OH! Yes, I believe so. They're all freshmen, and mine was one of the core courses," Anthony said. "And yes, I might be able to get hold of the ones that were trained, mentally, and suggest that they bring the rest over. But that would be more than I could fit in my office, or even in my theater."

"Yes," Muriel said. "But not too many for the training room behind the reception desk. Nicole, Shannon, Sean, were you all in the same course of study?"

"Yes," said Nicole. "We were all looking to get into politics in one form or another." And Muriel got that devilish grin on her face. "What do you have in mind?"

"Well, it's like this. One of my titles is the Chancellor of the University of Home. I think we could set you up with some basic courses that might help you understand politics a little better. The trouble is that they go way beyond what you're getting in college, now," Muriel said.

"What do you mean, 'way beyond'?" asked Sean.

"They are doctorate degree programs," Muriel replied. "And there's actually more than one of them that would be helpful in getting into politics. Political Science is one of them. Law is another, and that one would give you enough information to pass the bar. History and Sociology would also be helpful."

"Do you have any idea just how long it would take to get four PhDs?" asked Sean. "It would be years before we could do anything about the problems. And I'm pretty sure that the politicians in office, now, don't have PhDs."

"About ten to twenty minutes," Muriel said. "About five minutes per course. Our methods of teaching are NOTHING like what you're used to. Look up there," she added, pointing to her certificates. "I've been collecting PhDs since I was twelve. And you're right. Some of the politicians are lawyers. Some are from other areas of society, including business. Do any of you follow what laws are being passed in the Legislative Assembly, now?"

"Muriel," Taylor interrupted, "are you intending to corrupt these poor, innocent children?"

"Probably," Muriel replied. "And you're right. They really should speak to their parents about this, first. And we'd need to see about jobs for them. At least until they could work their way into the parties and get nominated. But it would definitely make the discussions with Anthony livelier," she added, grinning. "No," she said with more seriousness, "you're right. I shouldn't corrupt these young people. They should go ahead and get their degrees, first, and have a chance to see what's really going on in their society. They need to find out where the discontent is and what the actual causes are without my tossing my perceptions at them."

They also need the opportunity to get used to their new skills.”

“Sir . . . um . . . ,” Shannon began, “I do feel that we should take exception to your calling us children . . . um.” And Taylor looked at her. “Well, really . . . um . . . I mean . . . we really aren’t that much younger than you are. And, well, I mean, yea, you’ve gone through a lot of things that we haven’t. But really . . . children?”

Taylor continued looking at her for a moment while the others held their breath, dreading what was to come. After all, Shannon had just told off the King. Then, he smiled. “Quite right, Shannon, and I apologize. Yes, you’re young. And yes, you may not have had the experiences that Muriel and I have had,” he said. “But ‘children’ was thoroughly out of line and insulting. Will you forgive me?” And Shannon blushed.

“Um . . . I’m not sure it’s my place to forgive you, sir,” she finally stammered.

“Actually,” he said, “it is. Here, we’ve been trying to build a friendship, and I went and blew it. You are a person, an intelligent being of some obvious worth. There was no cause for me to demean you in any way, and now it’s put a barrier between us that I’d really rather not have there. Muriel and I have tried to get you three to understand that you could deal with us, freely, as equals, and I went and tossed something at you that caused you to go from respect to formality. I’ve hurt you by unthinkingly calling you children. That was uncalled for, for two reasons. First, and most importantly, because I DID hurt you. And second, because I’ve been trying to build a rapport between us so that you’d feel free to tell me when you see injustice in the world around you. Things that you feel should be addressed in society.”

“Spies,” Sean said, in disgust.

“No . . . advisors,” Taylor replied. “Nothing clandestine. No looking in windows or telling tales about people. We – both Muriel and I – need people to let us know when there are problems in society. When people are taking advantage of others for their own greed or desire for power, or whatever.”

“I think he means it,” Nicole said. “I think he really cares about our opinions, Sean.” And Muriel held her breath.

“Oh, bull!” Sean said. “He’s just like all the others. He’s just trying to use us.”

“To what purpose, Sean?” Nicole said. “He’s not asking us to ‘come over to his side’ or parrot the things he wants to hear. He’s asking us to let him know when there’s problems. When we see things happening that could hurt other people.”

“Um . . . Taylor? I’ll forgive you,” Shannon said. “I’d rather be friends with you. I don’t think you meant it to be derogatory.”

“Thank you, Shannon,” he replied. “I appreciate it.”

“Yea, right. And what happens when we tell him that something that he’s done is

hurting people?" asked Sean.

"I listen. I try to find out what I did, and how it can be repaired," Taylor said. "And right now, I'm listening very hard to the fact that you feel that I'm just 'being the man' – just trying to manipulate you. And I'm at a loss to know how I can prove to you that I'm not. One unthinking moment, and I've lost a friendship. And I'd really like to gain that back, if I could. Is there a way? Is there some way that you could accept my apology?"

"I don't know, Taylor," Sean said. "I suppose it would depend on how you behaved toward us in the future."

"OK," Taylor said. "That's something I can live with. Muriel's the same way. She won't accept apologies, because they're easy to come by. But she'll accept the way people behave. Maybe this will help," he added, taking out three cards and handing them to the three students. "These, shown to any member of the Regiment of Home, will get you directly to my office. Or, if I'm not there, they'll take you to wherever I happen to be at the time. No appointment necessary. If you have a problem, you come to me, and we'll figure out how to solve it. Muriel runs an 'open office'. She expects people to just drop in. Unfortunately, I'm not allowed to do that, yet. It's one reason I try to get out and meet people."

"And, just to be sure that there's no confusion," Muriel said, "here's my card. You're Citizens of Home. So it's my responsibility to see to it that you're treated fairly. The guards at the Palace are used to seeing these and bringing people directly to my office. And, to tell you the truth, I think they get a kick out of it. So, if you don't think that you can get a fair shake off of Taylor, you come to me and I'll sort it out. Taylor's still learning how to do this. Me? I've been doing it since I was twelve. Trust me, it WILL be sorted. I don't put up with bullies in ANY form. I'm not about to put up with being consorted to one." And that got a short laugh out of the kids.

"OK," Sean finally said. "Yea, that pretty much tells me where it's at. At least, we'll give it a try."

"Thank you, Sean," Taylor said, smiling.

"Can I ask you something?" Sean said to Muriel.

"Yep."

"What do you mean by an 'open office'?" he asked.

"Oh, that's simple. I'm willing to meet with anyone. Even those that are 'out to get me', and listen to them," Muriel said. "In some cases, I've found that what I thought was someone trying to bully me was just someone that didn't know how to present themselves in a way that I could accept at first. Usually because they were too cautious in trying to find out what they wanted to know. Sometimes they really WERE out to get me in one way or another. I've had all sorts of 'drop-ins' in my office. And one of them was even in Taylor's office. That one, the man was simply trying to find out how I did some of the things I did. It was a way of keeping

his son's spirits up and interest in life. The boy was dying, and human doctors couldn't help him. The man got found out, and finally told us what he was trying to do, and that his son was in my office. So, we translated down, and found that my ever faithful security chief, that's probably going to pound on me for calling her that, had gotten a friend of mine in to cure him, and finished up his training."

"So, why'd the man want to know how you did things?" asked Nicole.

"Oh, it was like a game to them. Nothing nefarious. The boy had been interested in illusions – stage magic," Muriel said. "Then they saw some of the things that I did. Well, that was after they'd gotten trained – fully, on the part of the man, and only partially on the part of the boy. And they tried to figure out how I was using the Envoy techniques to achieve the outrageous things that I did. One of them was that 'weeping bell' sound I used on the UN. And they nailed it. The boy figured it out. Well, anyway, they were mostly trying to get confirmation that that's how I did things. They'd tried flying, and finally had to ask an Envoy how I did it, and got straightened out that way. It really was a game to them. Not something that they wanted to try to use against me. Nope, when they were 'found out', they ended up being very open with me as to their motives."

"How DID you do that bell sound?" Shannon asked.

"Oh, I took the sound of a bell moving away from me, very quickly. You know how the sound gets lower in pitch as something moves away from you, fast? So, any way, I took that and varied the speed of it to make it waver," Muriel said. "Really had an effect on people."

"Well," Anthony said, "We should probably get these young people back, so they can study."

"Hmm. Yes. But not just yet," Muriel said. "I think there's something we can do about the college, if Sean, Shannon and Nicole are willing. Sean, you mentioned something about your new teacher espousing a fallacy in your last session with him. Or her. Come to think of it, I don't think that you actually said which. ANY way, maybe we can give you the ammunition to refute it. Of course, the information we'd give you would be WAY beyond what your present courses would cover. And, in the mean time, Taylor and I will take a look at what's happening in education, and what the text books you're using actually cover."

"What do you mean?" asked Sean.

"Are you all in the same basic degree program?" asked Muriel.

"Well, yes! Political Science," Shannon said. And Muriel grinned.

"Betty? Three orders of PolySci to go. Oh, and a side order of the advanced basics for each, if they don't already have them," Muriel said, and Betty laughed. And as Betty dumped the courses into the students, Muriel went on, "Now, the Envoy techniques were meant to be used. They WILL make you stand out as being different. DON'T let that bother you. We've shown you how to reach your personal shields and give them open-ended instructions to just

protect you. They will. The advanced basics will show you how to use shields to actually hold anyone attacking you immobile while you call the police. Catch them in a good pose, and it would be obvious to the officer who was trying to do what to whom.” Which caused the kids to laugh. “The Political Science course includes a good, extended, Liberal Arts basis. And that includes things like literature. Particularly Shakespeare. I think that might help you.”

“And,” Betty said, “here are your diplomas. Now, you might not want to display them until AFTER your confrontation with your professor. No sense giving him any warning that you're on to him. Some colleges allow you to 'challenge' courses, and simply pass them by demonstrating that you have a thorough knowledge of the material. I don't know that you could jump three years in the process, though.” And Sean got a thoughtful look on his face. Then he looked at the diploma.

“GEEZ! PhD? Eight years of college in five minutes?” he suddenly said.

“Yep. But not everyone accepts the University of Home as being valid,” Muriel said. “Despite the fact that the government has SAID that it is accredited. If you actually use the material, you COULD end up kicked out as being troublemakers. Let me know if that happens. And I mean, immediately. The education complex has been fighting us for a long time because it makes so much money not bothering to teach people, or teaching them poorly. We'd like to see that situation ended.”

“I'll see about making an appointment with the First Minister and deputy First Minister, Muriel,” Taylor said. “Would you like me to make one for you, too?”

“Yes, please. We probably should introduce ourselves before we turn the country upside down,” Muriel said. “OH! By the way. I should have given these to you before,” she added, pulling out three tablet computers. “Just take them and mentally say 'hi' to them. Then store them in a 'no pocket' until you get back to your dorms and have a chance to play with them. Jeff – sorry, the inventor – has added an instruction package in them. So, when you get back, just send 'instructions' to them as a question, and they'll take you through how to use them.”

“Oh, wow!” Nicole said. “I've heard about these, but never had a chance to see one. I figured they'd be too expensive for me.”

“The advantages of being a Citizen of Home, and in an Embassy of Home. If you need something that we make, it's free,” Muriel said. “Now, let's get you back.”

Chapter 31

Clash of the Titans

(Thursday morning)

“Mister First Minister,” Taylor said, “I’m mostly here to see that things are running smoothly. I’ve noted, in a number of cases, that there seems to be a disconnect between the law of the land and what is actually practiced. Now, in minor things, that wouldn’t bother me. But when practices actually cause people harm I feel compelled to take action. One of those situations comes up where legislators accept money from what are called ‘special interest groups’ to foster their agenda at the expense of the people of the realm.”

“Well, Your Majesty, I’m sure nothing like that happens here. After all, we simply administer the local laws, not anything to do with the realm,” the First Minister replied.

“Ah. Of course. Well, then, there is no problem with people with degrees from accredited colleges and universities getting licensed in their professions, or anything like that,” Taylor said.

“What are you implying, Your Majesty?” the First Minister asked, cautiously.

“Well, there is a university that came on the scene nine years ago, and has been proven to produce excellent programs that have been accredited throughout a large number of countries of the world, including Britain. And their professional licenses have also been accepted as valid in those countries. I’m sure you must have heard of them and accepted them, since they affect ALL the people of the realm,” Taylor said.

“Well, I’ve never run across any such university, nor had an opportunity to examine their methods and procedures, nor their licensing,” the First Minister said. “I’m sure if they presented themselves properly to us that we’d take a look at what they have. But really, that’s a purely internal matter.”

“Actually,” Taylor said, “it isn’t. It is the law of the realm, and enacted long before I took this office. It just hasn’t been put in practice because of the manipulations of various businesses. And I will see that situation change.”

“Perhaps, if you were to be more specific, Your Majesty, I could better understand to what you are referring,” the First Minister said, while the Deputy First Minister blanched.

“Well, then. Just as examples, Engineering, Architecture, Medicine and Law,” Taylor said. “Each of those require licensing. And it’s come to my attention that in this country the licenses aren’t accepted because the methods and procedures used in the practice of those disciplines, as taught by the University of Home, aren’t the same as those taught in the schools in this country. Now, I’ve had occasion to have seen what each of those disciplines, as taught by the University of Home, can produce. And I’ve done some investigation of the reasons that have been put forth for NOT accepting those licenses, or even the degrees. And

I've found those excuses to be invalid. I think it would be in the best interest of this country to come into line with the rest of the realm."

"Your Majesty," the First Minister said, gravely, "that particular institution, if I may term it such, is nothing but a diploma mill. They offer no real education, and their methods and procedures used in those disciplines bear no relationship to established ways of producing results."

"Well, sir, I happen to know that it ISN'T a diploma mill, as you term it," Taylor said. "In fact, they produce a better, more up to date education than is currently practiced in this country. And yes, the methods and procedures of the licensed disciplines, with the exception of Law, ARE different. However, their end result – the products that they produce – are far superior to those of the 'established' ways of making the products. So, I really am going to have to insist that they be accepted. Immediately."

"I'm afraid we cannot do that," the First Minister said. "They just haven't proven themselves at all. Furthermore, you are attempting to dictate to us something that is purely internal, and has no bearing on the realm."

"Well, let's see, now, Mister First Minister," Taylor said. "You have been getting leaned on by the construction industry – particularly the unions and licensing board, and materials suppliers, to make sure that the methods and procedures of the graduates of the University of Home are not used in this country. You've also been overly-influenced by the Pharmaceutical companies and medical insurance companies to not permit doctors licensed in the use of Envoy techniques to practice medicine in this country. And there are others. In short, you've been told what to do by the 'special interest groups' and ignored the needs of the ordinary people that you swore to protect and serve. This practice, by the way, is outlawed in the realm, as it causes harm to the people of the realm. And it's not just you. I realize that. But that still doesn't make it right. Therefore, Monday morning, if the situation isn't rectified and the influence of the 'special interest groups' negated, the arrests will begin. I think you can understand my position in this."

"You're just saying that because you're being paid off by whoever is behind this 'University of Home' scam," the First Minister said.

"I DO hope you have evidence of that allegation," Taylor said. "That's a rather strong charge to lay against your monarch, and would need to be proven in court. In fact, if you DON'T have such evidence, then it could even be possible to be construed as treason. Do you REALLY want to go there?" And, a bell rang, startling the two ministers.

"Taylor, if you give them until Monday, then they'll be gone out of the country by this afternoon," Muriel said, translating in. "Just arrest them and be done with it. They aren't worth bothering with."

"Oh, I don't think so. Their accounts are frozen. Including the off-shore ones they think no one knows about," Taylor said. "Oh, and that's true for the other members of the Legislative Assembly, too. Don't worry, Muriel. This mess WILL be cleaned up. They've had

enough warning that this could take place, from what's happened in other countries. Nope. I said Monday morning, and I'll stick to it. Oh, gentlemen," Taylor said to the ministers, "I should probably introduce you. This is Muriel, the Leader of Home and Ambassador to the people of earth. And, for some reason, she feels strongly that people shouldn't be discriminated against when they come up with a better way of doing things. Especially when the sorry reason for the discrimination is because some greedy people want to continue fleecing the people that look to her. Gentlemen . . . until Monday." And they translated out.

"So, that's how you do 'official speak'," Muriel said, grinning, as they sat in the recliners in Taylor's office.

"Yep. Pretty much," he replied. "You start vague and generalized, then move into specifics. In fact, I thought he'd have taken longer to force the specifics. Rather impetuous of him, really."

"And this was what you were trained to do?" asked Muriel.

"Yep. It's as bad as 'double-speak' in that Orwellian book, 'Nineteen Eighty-four'," he replied. "Nonsense, really. And the reason that so many bills are so poorly written. The legislators are so busy trying to cover their tracks with pompous words that they leave gaping holes in the legislation that a greedy person can take advantage of. And then, of course, all that greed is 'legal'. Same with those that seek power."

"So, now you'll make a poster child of how NOT to run a legislation," Muriel said, flatly. "By the way," she added, "I owe you an apology. When I scanned for information on the First Minister I never picked up on this little gem. I should have realized that with the squirming of the other 'Taylor'. He shouldn't have been as susceptible to blackmail. How'd you find out?"

"By going at it in reverse. Ralph had been looking at the various professions up here, and found references to their manipulation. And yea, I'll make a poster child of them. I think I'm going to run this one a bit differently, though," he said.

"Oh?"

"Instead of arresting them, myself, I'm thinking of simply taking all that money and sending it back to the source. Publicly," he said. "Well, not really send it back to them. Simply confiscate it, and pull public raids on the companies and organizations that paid off these legislators, making it obvious who was being paid off. Full raids. I think the shame would take care of the politicians involved. They might even find that it was hazardous to be known to be in any public or private place in the country. Perhaps even anywhere in the realm."

"Nasty, Taylor," Muriel said. "You'd be testing the local police, too, then."

"Yep," he said. "It would give me a good idea of who was actually doing their job, don't you think?"

"Well, it would make for some spectacular stories on the news," Muriel said, grinning. "Nothing better than a scandal to whet their appetite."

"Well, the usual formula is 'if it bleeds, it leads'," Taylor said, laughing. "But you're right, this runs a close second."

"Well, 'in other news'," Muriel said, which caused more laughter, "our three intrepid scholars have been taking me at my word. They're using the Envoy techniques, openly."

"Oh, my. How's that going over?" he asked.

"Amazingly well. It's drawing out others that have been trained. And the ones that don't have passports are being referred to Anthony. Sometimes, taken there," Muriel said. "It's causing some consternation with the University, though. They frown on the kids playing air hockey over the quad."

"Oh, they aren't!"

"Yep. Six teams, so far. And Shannon picked up on the use of mesh mind," Muriel said. "So far, they're unbeatable. But it's causing some of the students to miss classes, or come in late. And Anthony is doing a bang up business in diplomas. They let it out that he's the local representative of the University of Home."

"This is accelerating pretty fast," Taylor said.

"Not really. More a case of 'it's always been there', and now it's coming out into the open" Muriel said. "Kids tell their parents about the passports, and THEY visit Anthony. Then the parents tell their friends. There's more people trained, there, than we thought. And yes, Anthony is checking to be sure they've been to Home before passing out the passports. Barry's clued him in about that."

"Making sure they get the additional things? Like 'battlefield first aid'?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Definitely. And there's something else as an unintended consequence," Muriel said. "You know that resurgence of violent groups that started back up? Well, they're keeping their heads down. WAY down. One of them tangled with trained people, and lost, badly. As in enveloped in shields and held for the police. No one hurt in the process, but a lot of embarrassed rebels."

"Oh, my," Taylor said. "No, I hadn't heard about that. How'd you find out?"

"Shannon. She and Nicole were walking down the street when they popped up. She suggested that they go home and grow up," Muriel said.

"SHANNON? That shy, timid thing?"

"Yep. She told them off for fools. So they circled the girls, and one attacked her. The

girls held them for the police,” Muriel said. “And suddenly, off-duty police started showing up for Anthony to train.”

“Oh, my. And that's just overnight and this morning?”

“Yea. Wild isn't it,” Muriel said, laughing. “We started a minor revolution.”

::Muriel, this is Anthony. Can you come to my Embassy, please?::

::On my way. Mata, squad three, please,:: and Muriel translated out. And in the Irish Embassy a bell rang near the reception desk, and seven people translated in. By this time, the squad and Mata were in the fighting Class A's, and Muriel was in fighting formals, with the blood stripe prominent.

“I don't care what you say, you've got to leave,” Muriel heard. “You're inciting riots in this city! Obviously, because someone tried to bomb this place.” And Muriel switched her hat to the 'cowboy hat' style, in the same color as her formals, and with the emblem on the front of 'Special Investigator'.

“Sir, this is an Embassy. It is authorized by the Treaty of Home that Britain has with Home. The bomb was contained, as was the bomber,” she heard Anthony say. “Now, you're refusing to arrest the man, and trying to say it's our fault? I don't think that's a very intelligent attitude to take.”

“Triangles, people,” Muriel said, quietly, and added them to her own uniform. “ 'Ware the eyes,” she added, and flared her glow, bright, briefly to attract the officer's attention. The sudden silence except for her footsteps, and the 'panther walk' of her squad approaching the three individuals attracted attention.

“YOU! IN THE BLUE!” Muriel rang out. “WHERE'S YOUR BOSS?”

“Miss, I'm going to have to ask you to leave,” the officer said. “This is police business.”

“Wrong. It's the business of the Special Investigation unit of Home. You are on Embassy property. Ambassador Anthony, do you know the local Inspector, here?” asked Muriel.

“Not personally, but I can get you an image of him, Ambassador Muriel,” Anthony replied. And the officer's eyes widened.

“Mata. Bring him,” Muriel growled.

“What . . . where am I?” the man said.

“You're in the Embassy of Home for the people of Ireland,” Muriel said. “I'm Muriel, Special Investigator under the authority of the Treaty of Home, and Ambassador to the people of earth. Your . . . person seems to feel that it's our fault that someone tried to bomb this

place. The bomb has obviously been contained, and the person who delivered it held. Now, your person doesn't want to do his job. Is this the way you run your police force?"

"Ma'am, I'm going to need to see some identification. We can't have people interfering with the police," the Chief said. Muriel pulled her passport out of her 'no pocket' and handed it to him. The cover caused him enough worry. What was inside caused him to look like he was about to faint.

"Mister McCain, I suggest that you not go any further with what you're thinking," said a familiar voice from outside the Embassy. "This goes to a Treaty violation," Taylor added. "Which means that it goes to the highest levels of the British government." The Inspector turned and realized who was talking – hard to miss that formal white uniform and crown. Or the blue clad squad headed by Ralph. OR the two squads of mounted, green clad and grinning Regiment of Home behind him.

"Sir?" McCain said, with some trepidation.

"Nancy, is the bomb secured?" Muriel asked.

"Secured, but not safed," Nancy replied. "Give me a minute, please, Muriel. This one's easy. There may be a 'pop' from the detonators, but . . . yes . . . NOW, there'll be no explosion. We'll just keep it under shields, for now."

"Thank you, Nancy," Muriel said. "What about finger prints?"

"All over the place. Some of them match the man that's under shield. Some of them we're tracing back. Betty's on the desk. And she'd got a hit. We know what organization he's from and who made the bomb. She's gathering the evidence on the orders to make the hit. They won't pass Alice's sniff test, though. Audibles, only," Nancy said.

"Nice work, Nancy," Muriel said. "But, since this is on home property, I think we'll just roll them all up and help them take a little trip to Home. I'm tired of dealing with such trash. Just make sure you have the names of the next of kin, for the bodies." And McCain blanched.

Chapter 32

Crash of the Titans (Thursday afternoon)

"Muriel, why don't you just let my people pick them up. Treaty violation means that you can do the investigation your way," Taylor said. "Get the confessions from the men, and we'll see that they're put away. After all, we can't expect Mister McCain to follow through properly since he's been paid to look the other way."

"WHAT?" McCain said. "What do you mean, 'paid to look the other way'!"

"I also have my methods, McCain. We know you've been paid off by various companies and organizations," Taylor said. "My analysis team ran your financials and emails. We know the connections. The corruption stops. This was a well coordinated attempt, and I know who ordered it. Ralph, can I ask you to arrest the bomber, the officer, and Inspector McCain, please? And Muriel, do you suppose Marcia would be willing to pick up the other trash for us? My authority, of course."

"And the ones that gave the orders?" asked Muriel.

"Oh, I think we can handle them, ourselves," Taylor said. "You might even enjoy it."

"Oh, so THAT'S the way the wind blows," Muriel said. "You have evidence?"

"Yep. Emails from the source to the Inspector, and to the head of this rabble group," Taylor said. "I've already alerted Smythe. He'll send someone up."

"How's that going to help? It's not his jurisdiction," Muriel said.

"It'll help. Trust me, it'll help," Taylor said with a grim grin. "And this city will learn that when I say something, I MEAN it. The man will be given full authority to clean up this mess, as well as full backing."

"Oh, oh," Muriel said. "What did you do, now?"

"You'll see. Believe me, YOU'LL see. Best thought I've had in a long time. And yes, I checked my balance," Taylor said.

"OK, so who do you want Marcia to pick up, and where do we put all these people?"

"We put them in the warehouse prison we set up in London. They'll be tried by a Crown court. And the 'rest of the trash' are the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, and the list of Members of the Legislative Assembly that I have, here," Taylor said. "My man from London will take care of the rest of the problem. He knows his job, and he knows his targets."

"Sounds extremely mysterious," Muriel said. "Next thing, you'll be getting on your high horse and riding through the streets, putting the fear of you in them."

"Hmm. Think that would work?"

"GOOF! You would. Just to be outrageous. Again," Muriel laughed. "Well, let's get these 'dangerous desperadoes' out of here and let Anthony get back to work. Anthony, it looks to me like you did well. Just one question. Did you call the police?"

"Oh! No. He showed up immediately after the man with the bomb," Anthony said.

"Uh, huh. Well, you just filled in the details on the picture that Taylor was trying to paint. You did good, hollering for me. This isn't something that you should be expected to handle," Muriel said with a smile. "Now, all I have to do is find out why Taylor is being so mysterious."

While this was going on, Ralph and his squad translated the three men and a bomb back to London. Marcia and her cohorts surfaced, briefly, to get the authorization and names and images from Taylor, then went to do their jobs. Muriel expected that Marcia would be in her office when she got back, wanting to know how all this managed to happen. And Taylor was still grinning.

"I think we should pay the office of the Inspector a visit, now. Oh, and call the rest of your squads, Muriel. We'll get reinforcements from Home. We're going hunting. And it's a 'no bag limit' hunt. Ralph has been busy, and we've got hard evidence. Even checked through Alice. She just laughed, and said my legal team is getting good."

"Taylor, I have NO idea why you're so sure of this man from London being able to deal with something that's on Irish soil," Muriel said.

"Serious Crimes Act," Taylor said. "And a man that was taught to not only think outside the box, but outside the universe. At a special request from the Crown, dontchaknow." And Muriel hit him, just after they translated to the Inspector's office.

"ALL RIGHT, YOU PEOPLE! LISTEN UP!" a familiar voice rang out.

"Rob?" asked Muriel of Taylor, quietly.

"Hush," was his response.

"I'm Captain Rob Howell. I've been sent here under the Serious Crimes Act to deal with this mess. It's come to the attention of His Majesty, King Taylor, that some of you people have been on the take for companies that should have known better. They will now. The following people WILL appear before me and be arrested for taking bribes," he said. "And I don't like this any more than you do."

And then the list began. And with each name, an Envoy in the Special Investigator's

uniform brought in an officer. This went on for a half hour. As each was arrested formally, they were translated out to the London warehouse prison. Muriel and Taylor simply found seats and waited, patiently, until it was all over.

"Now, the rest of you," Rob said, "I expect better of the police. And I'll have it if I have to replace every constable in Ireland. Ireland has an Embassy of Home, now. If you aren't trained in Envoy techniques, then get your butts over to the Embassy and get trained. You ALL know where Greene's is. The Embassy is in the same building. By Monday morning all I want to see in here are FULL trainee stripes. Now, I can't force you to take the training. You have to want to take it. But, if you can't or won't take the training, then find another job, because you won't be fit to be an officer. Is that clear?" A muttered sound that could have been anything met his question.

"I said **IS THAT CLEAR!**" and his voice rang out loud enough to be heard outside the building, causing people in the street to stop in shock.

"Yes, sir," the ragged response came, just barely loud enough to be heard and distinguished for what it was.

"You're a sorry bunch of people. Why the hell do I put up with you? All right, you're on probation. Mess up and you're gone. Mess up bad enough and you're arrested," Rob said. "By this time next week this WILL be a functional organization that knows its job again. I want three sergeants to come with me. We're going after the ones that have been doing the bribing. Don't worry, you won't be hurt. All you have to do is arrest people as they're brought out. His Majesty, with support from the Regiment of Home, will manage the real work that you SHOULD be doing for you. Your Majesty." And Taylor stood up. To the chorus of a number of squeaks and the sound of jaws dropping all over the room.

"Thank you, Captain Howell," Taylor said. "Ladies and gentlemen I can understand that this is a bit sudden. However, conditions in Ireland have been under investigation for some time by my analytical team. Certain practices that were outright illegal were being fostered by a number of people, including the First Minister of the Legislative Assembly, your Inspector, and others. They've been arrested following a rather nasty attempt to bomb a foreign Embassy of a friendly nation. And now, we're going for the source. Other than the three constables selected by your Captain, none of you will be involved. The reason is that you are unable to protect yourselves from what could be some dangerous situations. So, since a foreign nation was already involved in this mess, I've taken the liberty of asking the Ambassador for assistance. Ambassador, would you please join me?" And Muriel stood up to thunderous silence, punctuated only by one whispered 'OH, SHIT!'

"I get the feeling that some of you may know who I am," Muriel said. "I also get the feeling that you know that a raid involving me is usually large, complete, and bloodless. Well, it's something else, too. It means that those involved are already guilty, and that I have enough evidence against them to prove it in court. Conclusively. I don't mess around. Now, I didn't train Captain Howell. But I know who did. A friend of mine that's the head of the Home Rescue and Recovery unit trained him. And she's MUCH more ruthless than I am. That's because she didn't train to be an Ambassador, even though she is one. She trained to be a

super-cop. Anyone have an idea of what it's like to pass the US Navy Seals tests? Or the British SAS tests? ALL of her people passed them both, as well as a number of other agency tests. So, you can best believe that Captain Howell isn't going to put up with any foolishness from you people. Any questions? No? I didn't think so. Rob, let's go hunting."

"Yes, MA'AM, Ambassador. My pleasure!" he said, and he, Muriel and Taylor translated out with the three sergeants.

One squad stayed with Muriel. The other three translated the constables to the locations that were being raided, and the take-down commenced. People and materials were translated out of the building, the people arrested, formally by the constables, and everything translated to the warehouse prison in London. When the action was completed, the buildings were bare inside. Walls and floors had been checked, as well as all furniture and cubical dividers. Shields were placed around the buildings to keep people out, and Muriel made the comment that it just wasn't as much fun to just stand outside and watch.

"Will you have any trouble with the crew, here, Rob?" Muriel asked.

"I shouldn't," Rob said, back in the Inspector's office. "A couple of weeks and things should shake down. Most of these people didn't know what was happening. It had to be a shock to them, though, to see me translate in and take over. The Inspector's secretary was the first casualty. He refused to accept my warrant, signed by Taylor and counter-signed by the Chief Superintendent. So, I simply arrested him for interference with an officer in the performance of his duties, and went on from there. Well, you saw the rest."

"What about your wife?"

"Oh, we're staying at the Embassy until this is over," Rob said. "One of my regular troops is checking on our apartment every day. His offer. And yes, I trust him. He's trained," Rob said. "Not something I'd ask of an employee or subordinate, but he DID offer. And come to find out, his apartment is in the same building. And I've got a security squad member doing the same thing. This here . . . ? This is pretty much what I did with my crew in Kidbrooke, and it worked out well. After the initial shock wore off, they realized that I could be reasonable as well as tough. It'll sort itself out."

"Muriel, I think we should go and see that Anthony is all right," Taylor said.

"Hmm. Yes. He wasn't meant to be in an action zone like that," she replied. And she said goodbye to Rob and translated out with her consort.

"Hi, Barry. Anthony?" Muriel said as they translated in.

"OH! He'll be right here. Go on in and make yourselves comfortable. Can we get you something?" asked Barry.

"No, I don't think so. We may just dinner next door," Muriel said. "But thanks, anyway."

They'd just gotten seats when Anthony appeared. "Oh! Sorry. Just freshening up some. I'm not used to such excitement," he said.

"Well, we weren't expecting you to BE in such excitement," Muriel responded.

"Thank you for coming in when you did. I was running out of arguments and repeating myself," Anthony said. "Of course, HE was, too. So, did everything go all right?"

"Yep," Taylor said. "You said the magic words – treaty violation – and had us all scrambling. But the results went off smoothly. Those companies are effectively thrown out. Their officers are arrested, and their records seized. They won't cause any more trouble. And the secondary source, the ministers, were arrested, along with a handful of the Members of the Legislature. And we've got a good man in as temporary Inspector. You did good, Anthony. Just what you should have done. Hollered for help and got us in to take care of the problem. We were more worried about you."

"Oh, no problem," Anthony said. "Once Barry assured me that the bomb wouldn't go off unless triggered, and that the trigger was immobilized, it was easy. Just, like I said, I ran out of things to say. I must say, it's the FIRST time in my life that that's happened. Usually, people can't shut me up."

That drew chuckles, and Muriel's comment, "Well, of COURSE. After all, you're a teacher!" Which drew more chuckles.

"Well," Taylor said, "why don't we get out of here and let you relax. Feel free to call on us anytime there's excitement."

"I will, if it's something that I can't handle myself," Anthony said. "The officer surprised me. I expected that SOMEONE had called him, and that's why he was there. Instead, I find that he was in league with the bomber, in a way."

"OH! That reminds me. You're going to have a rash of officers wanting to be trained. A friend of ours took over as temporary Inspector, and he's flat given them an ultimatum. Learn or leave," Muriel said. "So, just let your squads do the work, and you direct. The most work you'll have to do is to hand out passports, and Barry should be able to show you how that's done so you can do a whole group at once."

"Yes. And he's suggested that I re-rig the shields to keep such people out. Or at least the explosives," Anthony said. "Already done. He showed me how, and had ME do it. Much like the personal shields, except for the addition of encapsulating the explosive. That's quite a trick."

"Yea, and if you did them right it would even hold up to a nuclear explosion," Muriel said. "Now, I think it's time to bug Greene, some. He's GOT to have seen the excitement, and will want to debrief us." And they walked next door.

Where Greene met them as they walked in. "Is Anthony all right?"

“Oh, yes. Quite,” Taylor said. “He seems to have weathered it remarkably well for someone that's never seen action.”

“Oh,” Greene sighed with relief. “I was worried about him. Well, he DID tell me that he'd been through the 'troubles', but still”

“Nope. I don't know whether Barry calmed him down, or his earlier experiences helped,” Taylor said. “But he seemed relaxed with us. Quite chipper, actually.”

“Well, let's get you seated and something to eat. You've been through a lot,” Greene said. “Nice to see the Regiment involved, too.”

“Homesick?” asked Taylor.

“Nope. Not really. Oh, sure, they bring back fond memories,” Greene said. “But also some that aren't so fond. It was the job we had to do, though, and I'm not complaining. I'm just glad we had a GOOD commander,” Greene said.

“You should see the new one. She's taken off from where I was. They're still just as tough, but she's got them doing things to show the civilians that they're human and care, too,” Taylor said as he was seated. “She makes a good commander.”

“Well,” Greene said, “she DID say she wanted your job.” And they all laughed.

Chapter 33

Education on the Half-shell

(Friday afternoon)

"Well, my young friends. Have you had lunch, yet?" Anthony asked.

"Oh, yes. Just before we came over," Nicole said. "Greene was happy to see us. He even told us that," she added, which elicited a chuckle.

"Well, and good," Anthony said. "I asked Muriel to sit in on at least part of the discussion, because she was interested in WHAT the fallacy was in your new teacher's last class."

"Oh, that," Sean said. "Shakespeare. The goniff sloughed off the whole section because, in his words, 'it just isn't good literature, and besides, he didn't write it'."

"Oh, dear," Anthony said. "In other words, he's never read any, and isn't qualified to teach it." And Sean busted up laughing.

"I never thought of that!" he said. "Oh, my. Yep, I can fully believe that you're right. Anyway, I hit him right off the bat, asking him for evidence of ANYONE other than Shakespeare having written it. Well, he tried suggest that Francis Bacon did. And that's where the fallacy came in. His 'evidence' consisted of vague references to supposed correlations between the works of Bacon and those attributed to Shakespeare. He refused to even hear that there was evidence in Shakespeare's own hand on the title page, correlation from other notable figures from that period in history, and records in archives. He also refused to accept that persons living at the same period of time, both engaged in theatrical work and therefore subject to the same stresses of pleasing an audience might use parallel phrases and themes. Especially since they were borrowing from each other. This discussion took up the whole hour, and ended with his walking me to the Dean's office and having me expelled."

"OH, NO!" Anthony said. "Have your parents been notified?"

"Oh, yes. While I was in the office. And that's where it gets good," Sean said. "Shortly after the Dean hung up with them, he got a call from the Chancellor of the University. It seems that our erstwhile teacher no longer works there in any capacity. I've been reinstated, and the Dean's ear was chewed off about believing such balderdash. It was even suggested that a search for you be done, to offer you your old job back." And that set the party laughing.

"Muriel, I have to thank you for insisting that I have that PhD course. I'd heard of the Francis Bacon thing, before, but your course provided the details. One whole section of it was on the author question. It even cited references that I used, and outlined what the arguments were. Every argument he proposed, I had an answer for," Sean said. "The only problem is that now they want ME to teach the course. But, of course, I don't have the

credentials. I don't hold at least a Master's degree from an 'established' school of higher education."

"Oh, my. That fight, again. Well, I came armed. And legged," Muriel said, which added to the laughter. "There are at least fifty 'Western' countries that accept the degrees from the University of Home as being valid and from an accredited school. Britain is one of them, and I have a copy of the proclamation stating that. And it was signed by Taylor's grandmother about eight or nine years ago. It's the law of the land. So, if you want the job, let me know. I'll be blasting them, anyway. So will Taylor. We KNOW where this argument is coming from. Textbook publishers and the boards for the universities and colleges who look to lose a significant income if the University of Home is recognized. And the licensing boards are in it up to their necks, too. Their income is coming from unions and suppliers, but it's the same song and dance. I'll just have a little talk with that Chancellor, shall I?"

"Oh, my. I think I'm almost sorry that we invited you to come hear the results of today's class," Anthony said. "Almost. For THEM." And there was laughter everywhere.

"Muriel, if you don't mind, DON'T mention me. I never mentioned my degree and," Sean said, "the only reason that I'm staying in school is to get a degree from my father's alma mater and because my friends are there."

"GOOD reasons," Muriel said. "VERY good reasons. Very well, I'll leave you out of it. And you, too, Anthony. I think I already know your answer. If you went back, they'd try to put all sorts of restrictions on what you taught. Here, you can teach whatever you want."

"True, Muriel. And I appreciate your astute observation," Anthony said.

"Oh, I LOVE talking to professors. They use such highfalutin words," Muriel grinned.

"Hmm. Yes. I probably should tone that down, some," Anthony said.

"Well, anyway, I'm off," Muriel said. Then added, "and no one needs to agree with that last statement," which added more chuckles.

Moments later, a phone rang. "Office of the Chancellor. May I help you?" said a pleasant female voice.

"Yes. My name is Muriel White, and I'd like an immediate appointment with the Chancellor."

"Oh, I'm sorry Miss White. The Chancellor is tied up with members of the board, right now. Perhaps next Friday?" the voice replied.

"Oh, goodie! Fresh meat. No, I think he WILL see me now," Muriel said, and a bell rang in the office. "When I say 'immediately', I'm not kidding."

"Erk!" said the pleasant voice, somewhat unpleasantly. And Muriel proceeded past her

to the Chancellor's office and entered.

"Gentlemen, I'm here to discuss certain aspects of your institution that will shortly be changing," Muriel said. "Notably, it's existence. My name is Muriel, and I'm the Leader of Home and the Ambassador to earth. One of my functions is training people in Envoy techniques to improve their lives. Another is to be the visible face of the University of Home, an institution fully accredited in more advanced civilizations . . . including Britain. And Northern Ireland IS a part of Britain. And you, because of the fat salaries you make and the secure positions, have managed to bribe the accreditation board and licensing boards to think that it isn't. Here's the document," she said, pulling it from a 'no pocket', "and you'll see that it was signed by King Taylor's grandmother NINE YEARS AGO! So, you've been part of breaking the law for nine years."

"Gentlemen, the gravy train has had a long run. But, unless you put on the brakes NOW, it's about to imitate the Gare Montparnasse derailment where the engine blew through the station and landed on the ground nose down, one story below, killing an innocent bystander. You and the textbook publishers have gotten together and conspired to keep the price of education high. But the students you turn out are sub-standard to the point where, after all that time and all that supposed education, all they're good for is asking if you want fries with that. Now, there IS a way to make use of your Universities. There are people trained in various disciplines by the University of Home. These are full PhD degree courses that they would be willing to teach those that can't or won't take the Envoy training and can get their education for free, as a right."

"However," she added, "I know, just as you know, that you won't take advantage of this offer. It's there. I can find the people. These are full Citizens of Home, so you won't have the moral problems you have now, with professors chasing after students, or any of the other problems that you've encountered. What you WILL have is an honest, up to date education. But you've gotten your high salaries for little work for so long that you've come to expect that it'll last forever. And that just isn't going to happen. So, I suggest you make a wise choice before you run into a brick wall named Taylor."

"Hmm. Interesting choice of words, dear. I LIKED that reference to the Gare Montparnasse," Taylor said, standing next to his consort. "I remember a poster of it, where men on the ground were looking at it, and one said 'oh, shit'. And this, gentlemen, is YOUR 'oh, shit' moment. If you can't attain the level of education offered by the University of Home in one year, this institution will be shut down. Belfast could use another parking lot. Oh, and we'll be talking to the textbook publishers and the licensing boards and accreditation boards, next. Isn't that nice? We believe in spreading the wealth. You might even call ahead and let them know we're coming. And that they've had nine years to obey the law, and I really don't think they or you need more time. DO let us know if you can't make the deadline. We'll be happy to close you down early. Come dear. I think we've terrorized these people long enough." And they translated out.

And translated into Anthony's casual area and were immediately accosted by Sean. "Are you going to close down the university?"

“Probably,” Muriel said. “They’ll refuse to change. So, the officers of the corporation – the board, the Chancellor and a few others will be jailed, and the property will go on the block. And, it’ll be bought. And you’ll never guess who will buy it. AND its name. Teachers. Real teachers. Teachers that have the Envoy training and courses in their expertise. And it’ll reopen with the same name, with buildings that are fixed up so they don’t leak, don’t have plumbing and electrical problems and are off the grid because they’ll generate their own electricity, and make their own water, and deal with their own sewage. Courses will cost less, and be taught by people that really know their subject matter. It happened in America, all across the country. Don’t worry. You’ll get your degree from your father’s alma mater. You might even teach there, but without the restrictions that you’d have under this crew.”

“There aren’t that many good teachers,” Sean said. “Most of them just teach by rote. Memorize this. Don’t worry that it doesn’t connect to anything, just do what we tell you.”

“I didn’t say that the teachers that are on the staff will buy it,” Muriel said. “Oh, there may be some in there that are masquerading as dunderheads while still managing to really teach students. Anthony would have made a good one. In fact, Home may just buy the whole thing and put Anthony in charge. I won’t say that it’ll have ALL the courses that it offers, now, for untrained persons. There are some courses that require practical practice that the University of Home doesn’t offer. Medicine is one such. BUT . . . ALL the core courses will still be there. The liberal arts courses, but they’ll be to the PhD level. And the courses that DO require hands on experience, like Art or Engineering or even Medicine or a few others will be offered to Envoy trained people. And the rest that just require scholarship, there are ways of teaching them without having to use a mental link to download into. A friend of mine found that out years ago, and still does it with elementary and secondary level students.”

“You’re kidding!” Sean said.

“Nope. If you’ve got a couple of hours free, and would like to see history in action, I’ll see if there’s a time I can get him over here to show you,” Muriel said.

“History!” he said in disgust. “Never could understand it. So many names and dates to memorize and none of it made any sense.”

“Yep. That was his complaint. Now, he teaches it. One man commented that just a single one hour demonstration should be considered a complete college course. And I have NO idea how many he’s got out there, now. Neither does he,” Muriel said, laughing. “He should be up by now. Want me to ask?”

“Man, if he could teach me to understand history, he’d have to be a genius!”

“Yea, that’s about right. Oh, by the way, he’s an Ambassador – one of my original friends that came out to the American Enclave just after I started training. Ambassador – his window reads Trainer, Troublemaker and Bat Boy. Hold on. It might be worth it just for you to meet him.”

"Don," Muriel said and sent. "How would you like to visit beautiful Ireland?"

"You lucked out, girl. No classes today. The regular teacher came down sick, and the substitute wouldn't know how to do the background work so that the kids could really understand it. When do you want me, and where?" Don sent back in a way that they all could hear. And Nicole and Shannon's eyes got wide.

"Ireland has an Embassy, now," Muriel said and sent. "Well, Northern Ireland does, anyway. Hold on." Then to Anthony, "Does Greene serve anything like a breakfast?"

"Yea. He usually stops that around one o'clock. But I bet for you he'd come up with something. Plus some of his regular menu makes good breakfasts," Anthony said.

"OK, Don, here's the scoop. A man that had been a cook for Taylor's Regiment retired a few years ago, bought a building and put a restaurant in it. Then the city refused to allow him to fix up the rest of the building to act something like a Guest House. So, Home bought it, fixed up his restaurant, and turned the building into an Embassy. It's quiet outside the Ambassador's office, I'll give you an image of that," Muriel said, and sent the image. And a moment later a large gray uniform was walking through the entrance to Anthony's office, dragging the body of Don along with it.

"Hey girl, you've been busy! I took a second to grab a glimpse of the outside. Carla's work, huh?" he said, and grabbed a seat. "So, any particular reason for asking me to come?"

"Yep. Got a young man that doesn't understand history. Same complaint you had. Too many names and dates," Muriel said. "That's this young man beside me, named Sean. Next to him is Nicole, and next to her is Shannon. They're all in the core liberal arts section, and will be going into their majors next year. The man in the hot seat is Anthony that used to teach literature in the local university, and got fired for teaching students the truth. Sean's upset because we may be shutting down the university."

"Oh, joy! I get to corrupt another one. Well, it's like this, Muriel. Fran and I just got up, and if I'm going to be teaching, I'm going to need something to fortify my endeavors. You said something about a restaurant? I saw the name 'Greene's' outside. Is that where he escaped to?"

"Yep. And he'd been trying to do our job on a miniature scale. Come on, I'll treat," she said, grinning. "And if what I've heard about students is correct, they could probably stand some feeding up, too. And after you've managed to stretch your uniform all out of proportion, we'll drag you back to the training room where you'll have room to do your job right."

"Sounds good. Let's go!"

As they walked into the restaurant, a bellow went up from the back. "YOU! I can't afford you! You eat me out of house and home!" Greene hollered, storming out of the kitchen. "You come here, and the island could tip over!"

"Greene, you old scoundrel, you lost a hundred pounds, once, until you looked around behind and discovered where it went," Don tossed back in just a loud a voice. They stood glaring at each other for a minute, then grabbed each other in a bear hug. "Man! I missed you."

"Bull," Greene said. "All you missed were my meals. And what happened to you? You losing weight?"

"Got a consort, and she's making me exercise," Don said.

"Exercise, huh? Yea, I bet. So, who's the poor girl I owe a condolences card to?" asked Greene.

"Fran. We made it legal just a little while ago," Don said.

"That little bit of a thing? I've SERVED bigger things than she is," Greene said, then got serious. "How is she, Don? I've worried about her."

"She's OK. Oh, once in a while I have to bail her out of a nightmare," Don replied. "But not as often, now. And she really enjoys her work. I don't deserve her, you know."

"Yea. And she didn't deserve what life tossed at her," Greene replied. "But it's good to know that you've got her back. You always were an understanding kid. Yea, I can see you two getting together. Well, I'm glad. Say 'hi' to her for me, will you? And give her my best wishes. You still visit the Regiment?"

"Not as much now. Busy teaching history to kids who have NO idea what history is really about. They do when I get through with them," Don said. "Plus it's not as much fun now that Taylor isn't there."

"Yea, the Colonel was the heart and soul of the Regiment," Greene said. "But I understand from the troops that visit that the new one is JUST as good, if not better. They're having a blast. If I weren't so old, I'd think about re-upping. So, what brought you over?"

"A young Irishman that doesn't understand history. Gonna put on a demonstration for him, once I'm fortified against such an exhausting ordeal," Don said.

"Yea, right. Another free meal is what you mean."

"Hey, gotta keep up my slim, girlish figure," Don said, running his hands down his ample belly. And Greene and half his customers laughed.

"Well, get over here, and we'll see what we can do for you," Greene said, and seated the crowd.

Chapter 34

History Repeats Itself

(Friday afternoon, later)

“And that's how it's done,” Don finished up.

“GEEZ! So THAT'S what they've been on about,” Sean said. “And you do this with KIDS?”

“Hey, we're all kids,” Don said. “At least, if we do it right. And yea, this is what I teach in elementary and middle schools. And grades go up in the schools where these are used. It's not just me, either. Teachers all over America and some other countries that have the basic Envoy training can use these in their classes. And they feed back suggestions and requests, and I make up a new batch.”

“So, how come they aren't used in college?” asked Sean.

“I don't know. There are colleges in America, now, being taught by trained people,” Don said. “Maybe I need to get out and show them what I've got. Maybe that's the only reason that they're not being used.”

“You say that they're teaching the people that can't or won't take the training?” asked Shannon.

“Oh, yea. Maybe that's it. These are people that resist the training. Maybe just the fact that the training is being used to present things would upset them,” Don said. “Well, I'll look into it. I DO know that there are colleges that are acting like extensions of the University of Home. I really should get out more, and see what's happening in the world.”

“Well, I know that Iran is using some of your stuff,” Muriel said.

“Oh. Yea. Ameera. She did the same thing with one portion of the University over there. Seems to be successful, too,” Don said. “It's certainly turning their attitude toward Envoy training around.”

“Muriel.”

“Mata! What's up?”

“You want to see this,” Mata said, handing her a paper. “Sorry about interrupting your fun, but this is getting serious.”

Belfast, Northern Ireland: In a startling turn of events, Queen's University has announced that it will close its doors at the end of this school term. A spokesperson for

the University made the following comments:

“It started with one student talking back to a professor and implying that the man didn't know what he was talking about. The student was subsequently expelled for having taken an entire class period in harassing and denigrating the professor. Pressure was put on the Chancellor to reinstate him. Then the Leader of Home and the monarch of Britain barged in and threatened to close the University if it didn't support new and unproven methods, procedures and technology from an institution that is not accredited in Northern Ireland. It has been determined by the Chancellor and the Board of Directors of the University that they cannot any longer continue in the face of such unprecedented interference in the operation of the University, despite its long and illustrious past. The Chancellor and Board apologize for this abrupt turn of events, but feel that the blame should be placed where it properly belongs: with the Leader of Home and His Majesty.”

“GEEZ!” Sean said. “They're talking about ME!”

“Mata, how much have we got on the University?” asked Muriel, quietly.

“More than enough for probable cause, and nearly enough for an Alice slam dunk,” Mata replied. “These people didn't even try to hide their conspiracy. And, the licensing board is deeply involved. Their communication was better hidden, but their financials weren't. They were being paid off by the pharmaceuticals.”

“And the source?” asked Muriel.

“America,” was all Mata said.

“I need to speak to Melanie,” Muriel said, grimly. “They've been driving this for a long time. Taylor, I need whatever you have on the licensing board. And I need the authority to place someone in as Chancellor of the University. We need joint surprise raids on the University and it's Board, the licensing board, and the offices of ALL the pharmaceuticals at once. The University and pharmaceutical companies will remain open, but under 'new management'. They've overplayed their hand this time. And I want the information and connections made public.”

“At the appropriate time, Muriel,” Taylor said. “Don't mess up the court cases.”

“Agreed. The judge needs to be made aware that NO documents will be kept from the public. That these will be public trials,” Muriel said. “If the court attempts to seal the documents, then the collusion between the judge and the pharmaceutical companies will be made public. YOU should not be the one to tell him that, though. When I'm through it won't have been just Patrick that drove the snakes into the sea.”

“OUCH! That's a bit strong,” Taylor said.

“Taylor, you know my opinion of bullies. How long do you think they'd last on Judgment Square?” Muriel asked. “I'll tell you. Less than five minutes. They have caused harm to countless thousand – maybe millions – of people for their greed.”

“You'll need to replace the professors, too, you know,” Taylor said.

“Maybe. Some of that depends on whether they're trained or not, and whether they think they can find jobs outside the University in time to protect their families,” Muriel said. “Mata, get Ted, Jackie, Anna and the rest in on this. And find out when I can take up about an hour of Melanie's time. I want this to go down as fast as possible.”

“On it. Your squads are contacting the national Ambassadors, now, with all the information we have,” Mata said. “Chuck called Melanie and let her know what was up and where you were. She said that she'd dump what ever was supposed to be happening whenever you are able to break away and see her. Simply translate in. Oh, he sent her the DVD of all the information we have on this, and she looked at the summary and hit the roof. She's in. It's time you let ME in on some of this fun. I'm going with you, girl,” Mata added. “You've been gadding about without me for too long, now.

“Dear, I've alerted Ralph. He's got tie-ins to this, too. And he found the lead bank. It USED to be in America. There are still branches, there, but they moved their home office over here to Ireland because the tax laws were laxer,” Taylor said. “They've been using banks all over the world like the CIA used cutouts. And they were the ones behind that article. They also used the pharmaceutical companies as cutouts, and that's who hired the operatives that were used in that attack. Hard evidence. He's ready to use his squads, and has called for reinforcements from Home. We're ready for the local take down. Jackie rang in and will handle Britain. Toby said he'd handle Scotland, but he's going to need help from Home. He's got it. Tamara needs help. I had her contact Jackie. If she can't get help there, she can from Home, and Jackie can show her how.”

“Muriel, Melanie called back,” Mata said. “She told me to tell you 'no appointment necessary'. She's ready to pull the trigger. She passed the information to Henry, and the FBI mobilized, and she mobilized the active and inactive elements of the trained military. They're covering the country. Ameera said that she wasn't involved, because everyone that you were going after was removed from Iran. Anna just grinned and called for reinforcements. No direct connection to the drug companies over here, but there are to the banks. And she finally got a lead on the Russian Mafia – hard evidence – and are taking them out, too. She said to tell you 'the Cossacks ride again'.”

“Anthony, your squads and mine, augmented from home, will deal with the mess here. We've got enough information and hard evidence to do major damage to this network of lies and deceit. There may be pockets left when we get done, but this action should show you how to deal with them, and I'm always available to help. Basically, we're going to gut them. And a lot of money that's been tied up in only a few hands is going to go back to the people,” Muriel said. “Sean, Shannon and Nicole, I'm going to ask you to stay here, in the Guest

House, until this is all over. Here, you're protected even beyond your personal shields. And this way there's no chance that some jerk would try to get at you and arrest or abduct you."

"Ted couldn't get through to you or Mata, so he called me," Taylor said. "He only said three words – 'Pull The Trigger'."

"Do we have places for all the people we're picking up?" asked Muriel.

"Ireland is the only place we haven't set up a prison," Anthony said. "Suggestions?"

"We don't have time to buy and develop a place. This is moving too fast," Muriel said. "Taylor, will they fit in the warehouse prison in London? Technically, this is a realm problem."

"Yes. And the crew there is already adding another floor or two, depending on how much space this takes up," Taylor said. "We're ready, Muriel."

ATTENTION ALL AMBASSADORS! ACTION STARTS NOW. REPEAT, ACTION STARTS NOW. PULL THE TRIGGER! Muriel sent. And all over the world Envoys translated in to pick up their respective suspects and records. And Muriel got hold of the local media and asked if they'd mind recording a message to be played all over the world as she picked up the Chancellor of the University and the head of the Board of Directors and translated them to the warehouse prison in London. Anthony went with her to see that the action was actually minimal to the amount of effort that went into the build up for it. Then, it was off to the studio, with Mata in hot attendance, grinning like a Cheshire Cat. There, she waited until the last – Melanie – had checked in to say it was finished. Then, she turned to the camera and smiled as the little red light on top turned on.

"Hello, world. Sounds like a first effort at computer programming, doesn't it? My name is Muriel. I'm the Leader of Home and Ambassador to earth. And just moments ago, we engaged in an action to pick up criminals all over the world that were out to bleed you of your hard-earned money. These people have flouted the laws of each of your countries regarding what schools were accredited and what licenses were valid. In the course of this action, we've picked up thousands of people. Some from corporations, some from government that were being paid to write legislation that would harm you and simply put money in the hands of already rich people that didn't care about you. And some from banks and stock markets. We also picked up members of licensing boards, accreditation boards, the heads of universities and colleges throughout the world, and textbook publishers. These corrupt people have been making it difficult for you to just get along – driving the economy from depression to depression. YOU got hurt by the depressions. They didn't. In fact, they made out like bandits. And now, they're going to jail by way of the courts. We have the evidence of their wrongdoing, and the legal means to grab back their ill-gotten gains and put that money back into the economy."

"So, who are we? In some cases, we are Ambassadors of the countries you live in. In other cases, we are the Envoys that make up the basic staff of the Embassies in your countries. We were also aided by police and military organizations in several countries, as well as Envoys from Home acting under our direction. We are your neighbors, your friends,

your co-workers. We are people you may see every day. And in some cases we are people that have become famous for other actions that we have taken.”

“So, what do we get out of it? We get the satisfaction of knowing that now you can actually live as you were meant to live – free of being overcharged for necessities of life. Free of watching your income go to food, clothing, housing, and medical care. Free of having to decide if you're going to buy gas to go to work, or food to feed your families. Free of being taken advantage of by companies that add hidden charges to whatever you lease from them, like phones and software for your computers. Free of substandard education for you and your children. We don't get anything back from action like this. Yea, Ambassadors are paid. But that's a basic salary that we get for just being Ambassadors. And many – perhaps even most of us – use that money to try to help those that have lost the fight against those pirates of the world, the corporations and banks. And now, a major action has been taken to remove, once and for all, a major hurdle that you've not been able to surmount yourselves.”

“Many of you have taken the Envoy training, and have managed to reduce the financial burden on yourselves and your families. Some of you are still able to take it, but haven't yet. I urge you to talk to friends of yours that are trained, or to seek out an Embassy and get the training. It will help you in many ways. And some of you will never be able to take the training because you only think of yourselves and not of how your actions may harm others. And it's this last group that I'd like to talk to, now.”

“We are not leaving you alone. As long as you haven't engaged in outright illegal activity, we will try to find you and help you. If you're out of work, we may be able to find something for you to do, to feed your families. Even if you're unable to be employed, we can still help you by providing food, shelter, clothing and medical attention. We aren't ogres. We aren't out to judge you – that's something that you will do for yourselves, eventually. We're just out to stop the violence, the graft and corruption, the sociopathic behavior of people that would harm all people.”

“And now, it's time for me to go back to work. And you can, too. Look to your government and make sure it is working for you and not for the corporations. Look to your police and make sure that they aren't abusing their positions. Look to your religions and make sure that they're not trying to intimidate and control the lives of those not of their faith. And look to the Ambassadors and Envoys of Home for help, when you need it. It is your right. Thank you.” And the little red light turned off.

The director came out of the booth and said, “Half an hour, Ambassador. We want a copy for ourselves, and want to make sure it's clean before we let go of the original, that's all. And thank you for this exclusive. The station management has been on the phone since your request. First, setting up the links that would send this all over the world, then in getting requests for copies of this statement of yours.”

“No problem. I may send someone back to pick it up, though, if you don't mind,” Muriel said.

“Oh, that would be fine. Just have them ask for me,” he said. “Now, who are these

other two people. I know professor Hopkins, of course. He taught me literature a number of years ago."

"Yes, and now he's the Ambassador from Home to the People of Ireland," Muriel said. "Well at least Northern Ireland. And this is my security chief, Mata. She, or one of my security squad members dressed like this will probably be the one to pick up the record. Since you aren't trained, do you have anything against dealing with Envoys?"

"Well, no," he said. "Can't say as I've ever met one."

"Well, you have now. Mata is an Envoy," Muriel said, as Mata pulled out her red passport. "She and my squads have mothered me for nine years, now. And I've only had to make one replacement, and that was because the head of one of my squads moved over to a new squad."

"How did you know that I wasn't trained?" asked the director.

"Simple. See the stripes on my epaulettes? You don't have them," Muriel said. "Under normal circumstances only those that are trained or are Envoys can see them. They can be turned on, like mine, so that everyone can see them. I usually leave mine on, except for special circumstances."

"So, that's what they're for!" he said. "I've seen them a couple of other times, and never made the connection."

"Many people DON'T have the training. Some because they can't take it and live. Others, because of religious beliefs or other obligations. NOT having them, of itself, doesn't mean that they aren't good people. And they need jobs, too," Muriel said.

"Got it. OK, that helps. This is going to change society, isn't it," he said as a statement.

"Society? Yes, maybe. Culture? No. Not necessarily," Muriel said. "In fact, you may see a resurgence of culture in this country. It's happened in others. And even the society needn't change a lot. Just the elimination of the bad parts of it. The greed, the bullying, the corruption, the poorly constructed laws that allow a small segment of the population to walk all over the working people, THAT will change."

"Well, I hope you don't mind, but I recorded this brief interview with the hopes of clearing up some of the questions that people might have," he said.

"Oh, that's quite all right, since we did the same. In fact, we recorded the whole thing from the same standpoint as your camera over there. And that's an Envoy record, established as being valid throughout the world," Muriel replied, smiling. "We've found it to be expedient, when dealing with the media, to have a true and accurate record of what was said, in order to refute claims by various media outlets. It's our standard practice when dealing with the government, corporations, politicians in general, the media, or anyone of a questionable

nature. When we get your recording, we'll check it against what we have, to insure its accuracy."

"You . . . how could you record it? You have no equipment attached to the camera, or even anyone standing next to it!" he said.

"Ah. In that you're wrong. The leader of one of my squads is standing in front of the camera you used for the telecast," Muriel said.

"But, there's no one there!"

"Chuck, if you please," Muriel said, and Chuck slowly became visible.

"Oh."

"Yes. 'Oh'. Chuck is an Envoy, as are all of my squads. We don't fool around, sir. We also don't manipulate facts to try to promote an agenda. Some of the records we've made have resulted in libel charges against newscasters, which we subsequently won. That very quickly resulted in news media playing what we said exactly as we said it. They THEN tried to get around it with 'talking heads' – commentators that were told to try to slant things the way someone wanted for their own agenda. That didn't work, either," Muriel said. "It would sadden me to think that you would try something underhanded like that because some entity that no longer exists had paid you to try to bend the facts to fit his or her agenda. And now, I'll be leaving. As I said, I have a lot to do. Good luck, sir." And she and her group translated back to Anthony's office.

Chapter 35

Nobody Uses That Name

(Monday morning)

“Office of the Taoiseach, may I help you?” asked a male voice.

“I hope so. My name is Muriel White, and I was wondering if I could speak to Mister Gallagher.”

“May I ask what this is about?” he asked.

“Well, it's better said directly to him, but I'm an American citizen that has become an Ambassador. I'd like to present my credentials to him, and anyone else he feels would benefit,” Muriel said.

“I see. Just a moment, please,” and he put Muriel on hold. Shortly, a different male voice came on the line.

“Madam Ambassador, you weren't quite honest with my secretary, were you,” he said. “True, you're an American citizen, but your Ambassadorship is from Home, as a result of your being the Leader of Home. And you're the consort of the King of Britain. I really don't think that we have anything to talk about.”

“And does your Oireachtas feel the same way? Or is this a unilateral decisions on your part?” asked Muriel. “I'm not out to take over your country. I'm in the business of offering things that cost little or nothing but that can benefit all of your people.”

“And why would you be wanting to do that?” he asked.

“Because of various factors that boil down to people needing help just to stay alive. They deserve to be protected, have homes that don't cost them a fortune in maintenance, have clean water and sewage disposal that doesn't cause more harm to the environment. Because there are ways to cure many incurable diseases,” Muriel said. “And because we have means of educating people that go way beyond those found in ordinary colleges and universities.”

“That all sounds very pretty, but you're offering me nothing in evidence to back it up,” he said.

“Providing evidence would be best saved for when we meet, Mister Gallagher,” Muriel said. “When would you like to meet, and would you like to meet in your office or in mine?”

“Now, that's just plain foolish,” he said. “If I said we should meet now, and in your office, how would you manage it?”

"Like this," Muriel said, translating him to her casual area. "Tea?" she asked, and walked around from her desk to place a mug on the coffee table in front of him. "Welcome to the Embassy of Home, and the office of the Leader of Home and Ambassador to earth, Mister Gallagher. Oh, and you'll go back the same way."

"What IS this place?" he asked.

"Just an office. It used to be a salle d'armes in the Palace. Taylor allowed me to make my office here. The decor was done by a friend of mine – a designer, architect and engineer of some merit. She's designed a number of buildings for us, as well as clothes and cars, and engineered some of the buildings she built to show that they were stronger than necessary, considering normal materials."

"But . . . the walls!" he said.

"Ah, that's because the surface of them is made of a continuous shield that is a computer, tasked to create the illusion," Muriel said. "I DID say she was good."

"What are all the certificates on the wall?" he asked.

"Oh, courses I've taken over the past nine years," she said, casually, as he went over and began examining them. "Just things I picked up along the way as I needed them."

"TWENTY PhDs? Not possible," he said.

"Not with normal human education, no. But then, my education hasn't been normal since I was twelve," she said.

" 'Ambassadors All'. My son has a set," he said, as he scanned further around.

"Yea, we put them out five years ago. My friends were a bit disturbed that people didn't really know who they were and simply lumped them all under the term 'and friends'," she said.

"Statues. I've seen two of them," he said. "Well, the originals, anyway."

"Nope. Those are the originals. The two you saw were blown up from these by an Envoy in the American Enclave," she said.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"Because I created them. It beats twiddling my thumbs when there's nothing I can do about things but wait," she said.

Gallagher's phone went off. "DAD! It's doing it again!"

"Oh, gad. I've got to go home," he said.

"What's wrong?" asked Muriel.

"My son. He keeps saying that he's hearing voices in his head, and that something's trying to get in," Gallagher said.

"How old is he?"

"Eight and a half."

"OK, I know what it is, and it won't hurt him. Mata! Back track?" Muriel asked.

"Got it. Here's the image," Mata said. "I've got a shield on him."

"Then come with us," Muriel said. And she translated.

"Dad?" the boy asked.

"I'm here, son. This lady says she knows what it is," he said.

"I know you!" the boy said. "You're the girl in my set of action figures."

"Uh, huh. Do you know which one?" asked Muriel, gently.

"Yea. You're Muriel! You mean they're really real?" he asked.

"Yep. All thirteen of us," Muriel said. "We all got some special training when we were twelve years old. And now, young man, I'm going to tell you something strange. I'm going to ask you to let in what's trying to get in. It won't hurt you. It can't. It's actually part of you. And then I'm going to show you how to keep the voices out. OK?"

"OK," he said. And seemed to concentrate for a moment, then grinned. "It giggled!"

"Yep. And it's going to help you," Muriel said. "Mata, you have the junior dump?"

"Yep. Ready when you are," Mata said.

"OK, give it to him. Now, my friend, Mata, has a shield on you to keep the voices away. I'm going to ask her to take down her shield, and you're going to make one of your own. And if you think of a shield, you'll know how to do it. OK? Go ahead, think of it," she said.

"I . . . OK, I think I have it," he said. "It's like a capsule around me."

"Yes, it is," Muriel said. "And that can protect you from lots of things. Now, do you think you can talk to me in your head?"

::I think so,:: he sent. ::Is this right?::

::Very good! And now I've got to talk to your father, and let him know what we did. OK?:: she asked.

::OK. Thank you,:: he sent back.

::You've very welcome, young man. Now, if you get your action figures and say 'demo' to them in your head, you'll be in for a surprise,:: Muriel sent.

“Mister Gallagher, your son just connected to his soul. This is a normal procedure that happens anywhere from about his age to up around thirteen. What it doesn't do is take over. What it does do is provide him with some skills that he didn't have. We've put a cap on what he can do, until he gets older and can understand the responsibilities that go with the skills,” she said. “And there are a couple of ways that we can do this, so that he's comfortable with them. We can assign an Envoy to teach him and protect him until he becomes an adult.”

“And the other way?” Gallagher asked.

“We can train you, then you'd know how to do the teaching,” Muriel said. “And personally, I think that's the better way. He looks to you for protection. An Envoy would be a stranger, despite the fact that they are the gentlest, most helpful and most protective people you could ever meet.”

“I saw this other woman in your office,” he said. “She's your secretary?”

“No, she's my security chief, in charge of five squads. Four security squads and an analysis section. And she's an Envoy,” Muriel said. And Gallagher's eye widened.

“Oh, my! Um . . . what would it take to train me, so I could help him?” asked Gallagher.

“Maybe a couple of hours. I'd have to ask another Envoy to come help me with part of it. It's how to make clothes, and that should be taught to you by a man. But once you learn, you'd be able to change clothes anywhere,” Muriel said, and cycled through some casual clothes, and back to her uniform. “Then you could teach your son how to do that. The parts that we DON'T teach at this age are how to use shields to attack, and how to translate from one place to another. Well, you've had a taste of how fast we can get around.”

“And you'd teach me all of that?” he asked.

“And much more, if you like,” Muriel said. “And no, this won't cost you anything. People – humans – were meant to have these skills. But until nine years ago, there was a mistake in the way the soul was applied to the body. We've been teaching people where the soul didn't open up in them. But your son is young enough for that problem to have been corrected. I can cause your soul to connect to you, too.”

“What do I have to do?” he asked.

“Just ask. We don't train people that don't want it. Only those that ask to be trained,”

she said. "That's because there are people that are against it for various reasons, including religious ones."

"All right. Let me call my office, then I'd like you to train me, please," he said, and pulled out his phone. A couple of minutes later, he put it away, and looked expectantly at Muriel who smiled.

"OK. Let me give you some background. Humans are literally the Children of Home. Envoys are what might be termed intelligent power. Some people call that 'soul'," and the connection was made. "Just let it go. It can't hurt you. It IS you. And it won't take over. Your personality is always dominant. But it will give you more experience to draw from, as well as set you up for the various things that we teach. That's it. Let it make a deep connection, and it'll be even easier."

Finally, he came out of it. "Is that what my son went through?"

"Not as powerfully," Muriel said. "And from now on, the increase will be much more gradual. He was fighting it, which is why he got hit a little hard at first. Now that it's in, it will feed in more of itself as he matures. And the first thing we did was to send him the subconscious instructions on how to build a shield to protect himself. And believe me, it works."

"Yes, I've heard of some of the things you've been through. You mean it can help protect him from even being shot?" Gallagher asked.

"Oh, easily. Now, a lot of what we teach can be passed to you the same way, and then it just takes a little practice to get used to it," Muriel said. And she got him to make a mental connection to her, and passed him the information. In seconds, he had a solid shield around him, and was getting used to talking mentally.

Chuck came in and took Gallagher aside and taught him to make his own clothes. While they were gone, Muriel went to the boy, and watched him run the demonstration. His eyes were VERY bright, and he squealed as he watched them run flying routines, and play an airborne game of dodge-ball. Finally, Gallagher came back out and took her aside.

"There are some things I'd like to ask you," he said.

"Sure. If it's something I know, then I'll answer. If it's something I don't know, then maybe I can find an answer," she said.

"Oh, I think you know the answers," he said. "That man that left. He was an Envoy?"

"Yes. He's my squad two squad leader. He's also an excellent cook," Muriel said.

"Some of the things he said as he taught me . . . well . . . they're rather hard to believe," he said.

“OK, maybe I can help straighten it out. What's another word for Envoy?” she asked.

“Messenger, of course.”

“And a much older word that means 'messenger'?” she persisted. And he shook his head.

“Angel, dad. Angel means messenger,” his son said, casually. And his father's mouth dropped open. Muriel simply smiled and nodded.

“And that's what's in me? IN HIM?” Gallagher asked.

“Yep. And everyone, if they only knew. Your own, private, personal guardian Angel. That's your soul,” Muriel said. “Now, there's a couple more things to show you and you'll be done. The first is how to translate on earth.”

It was another half hour before they were back with his son, and Gallagher was a bit groggy from the trip to Home. He sat there, staring at his passport in wonder. “It's real. It's all real,” he said.

“The realest thing that can happen to you,” Muriel said. “Now, are there any courses that you'd like to take? I don't suggest more than three at a time. But I believe Betty has the laws of the Republic of Ireland”

“We never use that name,” Gallagher said, distractedly. “Oh, we're a republic, all right. But we just call it Ireland in English.”

“Oops. Sorry.”

“Nothing to be sorry about. You didn't know. So, how much do the courses cost?” he asked.

“Nothing. You're a trainee, and get them the same way you got the instructions for the basic skills, and the 'battlefield first aid' course, and such,” Muriel said. “You just let them go straight to your soul, and you'd be ready to use them immediately.

“You've done this before, haven't you?” he asked.

“Many times,” Muriel replied. “Starting with my friends. I wasn't even fully trained yet when I brought my friends out to the American Enclave and started training them. Ted, the Ambassador to America, thought that maybe four of them were trainable. We did things differently, then. All twelve kids made mental contact with me, and he allowed me to take it further – as far as I'd been. The next day, I finished up MY training, then turned around and finished up theirs.”

“Have you ever trained people as young as he is?” he asked.

"I've trained five and six year olds, which is how we came up with the methods of dealing with those that aren't mature enough to handle the last two stages, but need protection. Tell you what," Muriel added. "Take the day to think about what you need for your job – or even just want for your own curiosity. Call me tomorrow, and we can give you any courses you want."

"I'll do that," he said. And Muriel, Mata and Chuck translated out.

Chapter 36

No Nonsense Now

(Tuesday morning)

"Morning Darragh," Gallagher said as his secretary walked into his office.

"SIR! But . . ."

"I thought I'd get an early start. Sorry about leaving early, yesterday. Something personal came up that I needed to handle. Oh, and the Ambassador from Home will be dropping by this morning. Probably in a few minutes," Gallagher said. "When she arrives, just show her in. I understand that she doesn't normally use her titles. So, if a young lady arrives wearing something like a dress uniform with bloused boots, and says her name is Muriel, that's her. Be respectful."

"But, sir? I thought you didn't want anything to do with those people!" Darragh said.

"I didn't, then. I do now. I was misinformed," Gallagher said. "And I have an idea where the misinformation came from. That's for later. Just make sure that she's treated respectfully, and brought straight in. We have some things to discuss. Oh, and Darragh, no nonsense. While we're meeting there are to be NO phone calls or visits from others. Is that understood?"

"NO! Sir," Darragh managed to say, trying to gather some spine. "No sir, it isn't understood."

"Then just do it anyway, Darragh. I'd hate to lose you. You've been a rather good secretary, and replacing you would be bothersome," Gallagher said, tiredly. "Now, was there anything else?"

"You have members of the Dail and Seanad that would like to speak . . ."

"Canceled. Make sure THEY know that it's canceled. I'm not kidding around, here, Darragh," Gallagher said. "This is important. Both to me and to Ireland. Possibly the most important thing we'll see in our lifetime. This young woman is far more powerful and accomplished than I was lead to believe. She's also far more gentle. Just do your job. You'll understand sometime. Now, I think you'd better get out there. I'm sure she'll be dropping by soon." Gallagher was going over some papers when he heard a bell ring. The same type of bell that he'd heard when Chuck had come into his home to teach him to dress. He figured it wouldn't be very long before Muriel was in his office.

He was surprised when he heard ::Gallagher:: And he knew what the problem was without even looking.

"Darragh," he said, opening his door. "Do you remember what I told you to do?"

"Sir, she's not on the list!"

"Oh, my," Muriel said. "I've heard that one before."

"Darragh, would you describe this young lady to me, please? That should be easy, since she's standing in front of you," Gallagher said.

"But sir . . . !"

"NOW! Darragh," Gallagher insisted.

"A young lady in some sort of outlandish white uniform, sir," Darragh said, defensively.

"Boots, Darragh. What about the boots?"

"Oh, bloused, sir. But she just said that her name was Muriel. We don't have any 'Muriel' on the list," Darragh said.

"Muriel, would you be so kind as to show this recalcitrant young man some identification, please?" Gallagher said.

"Of course, Taoiseach," she said, smiling, and drew out her passport and handed it to the man. As she did so, Mata quietly – mentally – called in Nancy and her squad. They arrived WITHOUT the fanfare that Muriel had used.

"Now, young man, I suggest you look through that document and see what you can find," Gallagher said. "You might find it somewhat enlightening." Darragh made some moves at looking at the passport, but not too carefully.

"It just says that her name is Muriel White, sir."

"Keep reading, Darragh. What ELSE does it say?" and Darragh paled.

"It says that she's t-t-t-the Leader of Home, sir."

"Anything else?"

"She's the Ambassador to earth."

"AH! Then she IS on the list, isn't she, Darragh," Gallagher said. "Ambassador Muriel, the Leader of Home. Yes, I'm sure I mentioned something about this. Oh, and I see she's wearing something like a dress uniform with bloused boots. Does that description ring a bell? And speaking of ringing a bell, I seem to recall hearing one. Was that, perhaps, so that you'd be looking when you noticed her unorthodox method of entering the room? Darragh, this is not the first time that you've tried to lose an appointment that I had made. Particularly in favor of one that YOU had made for me with people that insisted that I behave in a certain manner.

You've been warned of this behavior before, and here you've tried to pull it on what may be the most important person on earth, today. I think that I can probably put up with a secretary from the pool until I can find someone that isn't bought and paid for by elements outside the government, Darragh. Your services are no longer required. Make sure that you don't inadvertently take something of a sensitive nature with you as you leave. Oh, before you go, Muriel, is there a reason for the red stripe on your pant-legs and on that, what do you call it?"

"Fly plaid, sir. The red stripe denotes action against armed opponents, sir. Most of them were defeated in one way or another. Usually by being disarmed and held for arrest by me and my squads. The first five weren't dealt with that way, and still work for me. That's because they were one of my squads testing my shield to be sure it would hold," Muriel said with a grin.

"You note that she's NOT armed, Darragh? And that she says that she defeated armed opponents who shot at her? Does that tell you something, Darragh? Like maybe this is NOT a person to be taken lightly? Yet, she's been polite, helpful, courteous, friendly and gentle with you," Gallagher said. "Take that information back to your keepers, Darragh. And tell them that I'm extremely displeased with the quality of the information that they've been trying to feed me over the past three years. And that they will no longer be welcome in this office. Now, get out."

As Darragh left, Muriel turned to Nancy and said, "Thanks for coming. I think we've got it settled now."

"All but the bit about a secretary. I've done a bit of that work, before. Perhaps I can fill in until someone responsible arrives," Nancy said, grinning. "I'm sure the rest of the squad can manage to look bored and intimidating to those that come in, later, to try to interrupt. That is, if the Taoiseach Gallagher doesn't mind."

"You'd act as a secretary?" Gallagher asked.

"Why not? I've done it before," Nancy said. "Answering phones is easy. Clearing this mess up and organizing it is only a bit harder. Typing up papers is a breeze. That'll give you time to talk to Muriel, and for someone from your secretarial pool to be assigned here."

"But, you're an Envoy! Isn't that beneath you?" he asked.

"Nope. We do lots of analysis and paperwork – well, we don't actually use paper. We use computers. Just let me know if there's anything in particular that you want done first, sir," Nancy said.

"Yea. Find me an Envoy trained secretary," Gallagher said, laughing. "You people are TOO MUCH!"

"Better than not being enough," Nancy said, grinning. "Go on, you two. Have your 'high level discussion' and let me get on about my work." And Gallagher ushered Muriel into his office, still laughing and shaking his head.

"Listen up, squad," Nancy said, gently and grinning, once the door was closed. "I'm expecting that Darragh didn't cancel the meeting with the five from their parliament. Which means that we're probably going to have visitors, soon. In addition, before he left he pushed a button under the lip of the desk. So, I'm expecting security, too. Just be bored with them unless they get active. And put up a shield to keep them from just barging in on them." And the squad grinned. "Now, let me play secretary."

Inside the office, Gallagher decided on what courses he wanted, and received them. Then the discussion moved to what sorts of things Home actually provided – what would cost the people or government, and what would be free. He also found out how Home ran it's Enclaves and Embassies. With the realization that the government wouldn't be footing the bill for the land or utilities, and that Home would pay the taxes on the property, he was MUCH more agreeable to the notion of having an Enclave somewhere in Ireland. And outside, the men and women of the parties that had put Gallagher in the office of Taoiseach traipsed in and tried to blow past the secretary's desk. They discovered that a shield obstructed their way, rather painfully in a couple of cases, since they led with their nose.

"What is this?" one pompous politician asked.

"Oh, nothing much," Nancy replied. "Just a shield to keep people from sticking their nose in where it doesn't belong. I see you tried, though. Would you like us to help you stop the bleeding, now?"

"We have an appointment with the Taoiseach. Let us in, immediately!" he said.

"Your appointment was canceled," Nancy said.

"I don't believe you! And where's Darragh? He's supposed to be here, not you, whoever you are."

"Darragh was fired for failing to remember who his boss was," Nancy said. "I'm just filling in until Mister Gallagher can find a responsible person for the position. I'm afraid you'll have to do without Darragh's services in the future. I'm sure you'll get along without his daily reports on how the Taoiseach isn't following your orders, despite the fact that the rest of the government does. Oh, say, maybe you'd tell me who you actually work for. We already know that it isn't your constituency."

"Young lady, you forget your place."

"Naw. My place is at the head of my squad. And my squad is part of the analysis of all sorts of outrageous behavior that goes on in the world," Nancy said. "We usually take a more active part in it, helping take down those that feel that they're owed something by the 'little people' because they're so much better. Greed for money, power, fame, it's all the same actually. The idea that people don't count, and that only YOU are important. Now go away. You're keeping me from my work."

“Young lady, I don't think you know who you're talking to.”

“Oh, sure I do. You're the idiot that thinks he has the right to break up a high level meeting of the Taoiseach and the Leader of a friendly foreign nation simply because you've been paid off by various businesses and organizations,” Nancy said. “Would you like me to itemize them for you, in case you've forgotten a few? I can even give you the amounts you've collected, if you like. Oh, and the contacts you have with those businesses and organizations, as well as the collusion between them. We can even provide hard-copy so that you can take them back to your offices where you can share the information with your owners.”

“I insist that you let us in! You have no idea what level of treason you're reaching to!”

“Uh, uh. Not treason. This isn't my country,” she said, pulling out her passport and showing it to him. “I'm just here to do a job. And that job was made clear to me. You will not be admitted while this meeting is going on. Afterward, maybe, depending on the will of the Taoiseach. NOT you people.”

“Nancy,” Gallagher said, coming through the door, followed by Muriel, “do you have that paperwork?”

“Printing now, sir. Just a moment,” and she reached over to the printer. “Here's the first three. The rest are still printing. This is a synopsis, sir. The full thing would take about a half hour to print out.” Gallagher looked at the papers and, just as he finished the first three, Nancy handed him the other two.

“This is very interesting. And you say this is just the synopsis,” he said. And five people started to back toward the door and were stopped by four members of the attack squad. “VERY interesting. I had no idea that this sort of thing was going on. I really think you people should stay where you are until the proper authorities can be notified.”

“This is outrageous, Gallagher! YOU work for US, and you will do what you're told!”

“Really? Interesting. I'm sure that the Dail and Seanad will be most interested in finding out that you are being paid by multi-national corporations and other agencies to tell me what to do,” Gallagher said. “I know for fact that the police would be interested. I've often wondered where some of your ideas came from. How long has this been going on?”

“Oh, grow up, Gallagher! This is the real world, not some dream you're having. You won't last five minutes in the Dail when we expose your connection to this unreal so called foreign nation.”

“Perhaps. But it won't be you that does the exposing,” Gallagher said. “From what I see here, the least you'd be charged with is accepting bribes. That should land you in prison for about twenty years, as well as requiring the repayment of the funds you've squirreled away. Between the five of you, that's quite a tidy sum. Oh, and penalties. Can't forget those. You know? It's just occurred to me that your families might be a bit miffed by your behavior

causing them to lose their standing in society, and all the little luxuries that they enjoy. Have fun explaining to them how your behavior is part of the real world. And do let me know how that works out for you.”

“YOU WON’T GET AWAY WITH THIS!”

“Interesting,” Muriel said. “I’ve been doing this sort of work for nine years now. I keep hearing that same phrase. Seems like it translates almost directly into so many other languages. Oh, and here comes security – belatedly. I wonder who owns them.”

“What goes on here? Who are all these people?”

“You’re late,” Gallagher said. “I’m sure my former secretary alerted you before he left this office. I suggest that you go back to your office. On the other hand, you can wait around, making noises, for the police to arrive to take these deputies into custody.” And the security force quickly left. “Hmm. I thought so.”

Chapter 37

Aftermath of the Meeting of the Dail

(Tuesday morning, later)

"Muriel, what do you need for an Embassy?" asked Gallagher. "And how long would it take to set it up?"

"Good question. We've done everything from an old hotel to a complete community," she replied. "The minimum we need is an office for the Ambassador and four squads, a restaurant, law office, some shops and a medical clinic, and enough room for a Guest House and training center/conference room. That's what we did just recently in an old hotel. Two days to set it up – basically, rebuilding the building to strengthen it and create the ambiance we wanted to fit the area. You do realize that once we purchase the land, that the entire property is the Embassy, since it's purpose is the support of the Ambassador, don't you?"

"Hmm. Yes, you said. And I've heard that from other countries. Even where it's a whole community that was involved. Unusual, but I can understand why you do it," Gallagher said. "And it's under your jurisdiction rather than ours?"

"Of course. However, we're not hard-nosed about it," Muriel said. "It's just that, in the early days, we had police that felt that they could come in and arrest people – even Ambassadors – despite the fact that it's written right into the treaty that that is not permitted. Inside the property is the rule of Home. We are not part of any country, or subject to any national or international rule."

"You know? I can actually understand that. But how do you keep them from cutting off your utilities?" he asked.

"We generate our own. A power converter large enough to handle the Enclave produces electrical power and water, and disposes of sewage. Plus the restaurant, clinic and Ambassador's office have their own converters. It was a standing joke, in America," Muriel said, "that if it ever came to a siege, we might have to provide food and water to those holding the siege." And Gallagher laughed. "Actually, it's worse than that. Because with the ability to translate, we can go wherever we want. And asylum in one Embassy is asylum in ALL the Embassies, which means that we can translate someone out of the line of fire, and the country wouldn't know where they were. In fact, we did it on one occasion. Programmers that a company was trying to enslave. We lifted them out of America and put them in Britain, in 'The Welcoming One'. It counts as an Embassy, even though it's separated from my office, simply because it's Home property and under my supervision."

"Well, anyway, The Dail accepted your credentials, and have voted to accept your Embassy and Ambassador," Gallagher said. "And the Seanad will follow suit. So, you should be all set as soon as you find someone to take the position of Ambassador, and find the property."

"We've got people working on that. Is there going to be any problem with my bringing in my own architect, or with using Envoy techniques in building?" asked Muriel.

"There'd better not be. We remember the wave of acceptance across the world when America accepted the techniques. And you are your own nation. You can have who you choose design and build it," Gallagher said. "Is there any chance we can see inside it when it's up?"

"Oh, EVERY chance. We run open Embassies. The only time they're closed is when there might be a conflict with the 'host' nation," Muriel said. "As long as people coming in don't try to throw their weight around, there's no problem. When I say that the Embassy and Enclave are under the rule of Home, I mean it. Home has no rules. It doesn't need them. The Enclaves have only one. It's against the law to break the peace of Home. That covers everything from drunk and disorderly to somebody throwing missiles at us." And Gallagher laughed.

The sound of an explosion startled them, and Muriel went into hyper-drive. "OK, it was contained. Nancy's squad englobed it. Delivery truck. No damage to the structure. OH! And one of her squad has the driver. Mata's fuming. She's my security chief, and she's missing all the fun. Ted's sent over the head of maintenance for the American Enclave to see if any evidence can be gathered from the remains of the bomb or the truck. Mata's got the other three squads pulled in and covering the building. She thinks that a passenger may have escaped the truck and run into the building. OH! That's why! One of the squad tagged the man, and is tracking him, now. And she's . . . GOT HIM! Good!" And she dropped out of her hyper state.

"GOOD GRIEF! That's fast!" Gallagher said.

"We've done this a few times before," Muriel said. "After a while, it gets to be repetitive. Where would you like the two to be taken?"

"Our Garda Síochána should be able to take care of them," Gallagher said. "Though I understand that your investigative techniques are a bit unique." Muriel laughed.

"Yea, you might say. You know, you're going to have to do this, yourself, in the future. It's simply because we were here when it happened that we caught them so quickly and avoided any damage," Muriel said.

"Yes, I know. Well, where are you on finding an Ambassador?" he asked.

"Nowhere, yet. All the trainees are keeping their heads down. I'm going to have to go out and look around the city and see what I can find," Muriel said.

"It could be dangerous for you out there. We still have pockets of discontent," he said. Muriel laughed.

"Gallagher, I've had TANKS shoot at me. I picked the shells out of my shield, then

tipped them over, front to back. Laid them on their turrets. I had a jerk throw a chain bomb at me. About a hundred bomblets on a chain or cable, or something. Wrapped me up in it. They went off, and not even my hair was mussed. Plus, I've got four squads of panther-walking Envoys and a very mothering security chief. I just keep coming through it all," Muriel said. "I'll be fine. But I've GOT to see the city and its people, or I'll never find an Ambassador."

"Keep in touch," he said, and Muriel smiled and translated out.

On the street, Mata said, "You didn't mention that the last one was an out of work professor, and the one before that was a street kid – homeless. And you trained them both."

"I didn't want to worry him," Muriel said, grinning. "Can you just see him dealing with a street kid?" And Mata laughed, and went stealth, like the rest of the squads.

Muriel picked a direction by chance, just following something that wasn't even a hunch. Just a nudge. She seemed to be aimlessly wandering, but most of that was because whatever was drawing her was diagonal to the streets. After a while she came to a green-scape – a park, and a young woman sitting on the grass. Muriel switched to civilian clothes.

"Hi. Live around here?" Muriel asked.

"I used to. Building's condemned," the woman said. "You're trained! And you're letting your stripes show?"

"Yea, well nobody's ever effectively bothered me," Muriel said. "I'm Muriel White, from America. I'm looking for a place to set up a business. The buildings don't need to fit the needs. Just the property. This isn't too far from the government buildings, and that's one of my target customers."

"Well, where I used to live, the property's fair," the woman said. "Oh, I'm Orla. And today has NOT been my day. No job, no food, no place to stay. The city took over the property, and evicted everyone."

"I can help with that," Muriel said. "So, I take it that you're trained, too?"

"Yea. Even been to Home. They said I'd get a passport, but nobody showed up," Orla said.

"Well, I'm looking for someone to run my business for me, here in Ireland. Training is no problem. Good salary and benefits. How about you?" asked Muriel.

"I don't know anything about it. Never got into business. Was trying to get into some sort of public service. Land a government job and maybe work my way up," Orla said.

"Tell you what. Let's go to my place and talk about it," Muriel said, and heard a snicker in her mind. "Give me the address of the property, and I'll have my people take a look at it."

Orla did, and Muriel added, "OK, they're looking. In the mean time, why don't we give you a place to stay and some food, and get you off the street. I'll take you to my office, and you can find out all about my business. OK?"

::Muriel, the property would fit our needs. Old apartment house, pretty run down, but large enough to do the same thing we did with Anthony. I've got Chuck looking into buying it from the city. Ted said 'grab it. You won't get anything closer to the government buildings',:: Mata sent. ::Take her home::

"I guess. Got nothing better to do. But I hate to sponge off of people," Orla said.

"Consider it as a job interview. There may be some shocks along the way, but I think you'll be pleasantly surprised. And it won't be sponging. You'll be my guest," Muriel said, and translated to her office with the woman.

"GEEZ! HOLY COW WHAT IS THIS?"

"Oh, just my office," Muriel said, switching to Class A's and leading Orla to her casual area. And suddenly, there were Envoys everywhere. One came in with tea for Orla, and delicate but substantial sandwiches, and coffee for Muriel. "As I said, my name is Muriel, and I'm the Ambassador from Home to the People of earth. And as for the passport, check your 'no pocket'. Orla did, and came up with a familiar green booklet. "If you take the job, there'll be some changes to the passport. Oh, for the better, I assure you."

"What's the job?"

"Ambassador to Ireland," Muriel said. "The job comes with an office, apartment, Guest House, restaurant, four squads of Envoys, a couple of shops or so, and a clinic for a doctor and a squad of Envoy doctors."

"Muriel, once again good news like you travels fast. The city sold you the property, and Ted's over there signing papers and paying the taxes. Carla's going over in an hour to see what she can do with it," Mata said. "She thinks that even if she has to demolish it, it shouldn't take more than two days."

"Thanks, Mata. Now, Orla, as for the job. Most of it is actually done by the security squads and security chief, like you just saw with Mata," Muriel said. "There's training for the job, and we supply it, free. You'll have a say in how your office and apartment are set up, and basically will go looking for problems and figure out how to solve them. You WON'T be just dumped into it. I've set up Embassies before, and I'm always available for questions and help. And I always pick someone that's part of the society. Part of it is the language. Part of it is that you've seen the injustice and troubles that are going on, and already have an idea of where they are. Again, we'll help you to solve the problems until you feel comfortable. Let's put it this way. Five years ago I trained an eleven year old girl for the job, and she pretty much took over right off the bat."

"Muriel, I'd like to take you up on your offer, but I've got a problem," Orla said. "My

brother. He's part of a group that's dead set against Envoys. He supposedly works for the Taoiseach, but in reality he works for some members of the Dail and Seanad to keep the Taoiseach from having anything to do with them . . . you . . . whatever."

"OK, well first of all Darragh is NOT you," Muriel said.

"You know who he is?"

"Of course. Which brings me to point two. Your brother no longer works for the Taoiseach. Gallagher found out what his game was and fired him," Muriel said.

"But, he's still my brother! He's the reason I was sacked from my last job! They found out!"

"Like I said, he's not you," Muriel said. "Though it is an interesting twist of irony. Gallagher's son just went through breakthrough and was hearing voices in his head. And his soul was trying to protect him, and he was fighting it. When Gallagher realized what I'd done to help the boy, he asked for the training, too. Well, Darragh flat disobeyed him, the next day, about letting me in and Gallagher let him go. Oh, and the five from the Dail showed up during the meeting to browbeat him, and are arrested for taking bribes. So they're out of it. Nope, it looks like Darragh hurt his last person with you. You might even have to put him up in the Guest House, at least for a while, until he understands that he needs to change." And Orla started laughing.

"Oh, this is TOO much. The number of times I told him that he was backing the wrong horse," she said. "All right, I'm in."

"Good. Mata?" asked Muriel.

"Waiting out front. Mind the 'whoosh' doors," Mata said, grinning. And, as Muriel led Orla out, the 'whoosh' doors claimed another victim.

Outside, a tall, red-haired man stood in a studied casual attitude waiting for her, ahead of four others who stood before four groups of four other people. The squads were mixed gender, and 'all of an age' – roughly matching the age of Orla. The red-head was grinning beneath a mass of curls that would have made a woman jealous. Muriel just raised an eyebrow at him.

"Afternoon, miss," the male Envoy said. "Now, and you're going to be having fits over this, I'm sure, but I'm Pádraig," he added, and flicked a finger above his head to the sound of a metallic 'ting', and a classic circlet halo appeared. And Muriel busted up laughing.

"Now THAT'S just TOO outrageous," she said.

"Yea, but it's fun," he said, without the affected accent. "And probably the only time I'd ever get away with pulling that gag." And the halo disappeared. "Kinda glad I got rid of that. I was beginning to be afraid it would fall down, then try to strangle me. Now, Miss Orla, I don't

HAVE to be male, if you'd prefer a female security chief. Or, you can ask for someone different, if you don't feel comfortable with me."

"Oh, no! You don't get away that easy," Orla said, shaking his hand. What followed was a dramatic pause, filled with nothing, and followed by a slow smile from Orla. "And now I see why you did it. It made me relaxed enough to make a deep link with you. And now I begin to understand what Muriel was trying to tell me about you Envoys being my support and doing most of the work. Yes, Pádraig, I can work with you. Easily. This is going to be fun!"

"OK, we should have the building up for you tomorrow or the next day. We'll put you up in 'The Welcoming One' until your office and apartment are finished. And tomorrow morning we should introduce you to Gallagher," Muriel said. "Carla, the one that will be doing the building, is seven hours behind us, so she won't be working on it until tomorrow afternoon. In the mean time, Pádraig, if you have gone deep, then you may have an idea of what she'll need beyond the Ambassador's course. Then we can take her to 'The Welcoming One' where she can start the process of creating her image as an Ambassador."

"And we're off to the races," Orla said.

"Heh. Yea. We do tend to get things done as quickly as possible," Muriel said. "Comes from long years of practice. You'll get there, yourself, in time. Don't try to compete or be me. Just be yourself. Your security chief will either have the courses you need as you go along, or have the availability to get them. You may even end up with an 'education' squad, like I did."

Chapter 38

Karma

(Wednesday afternoon)

Wednesday noon, after an early lunch, Muriel and Orla were outside the building where Orla had lived. Orla had been the last to leave when the city evicted the tenants, and Carla's squads had confirmed that the building was empty and erected a shield around it. Orla's 'shopping spree' in new clothes had resulted in her wearing an off-white pantsuit of some thin, almost shiny material. The jacket held epaulettes, and her stripes blazed on them, the gold Turk's Head fifth stripe standing out like a declaration.

Carla was already at work, reshaping the skin of the building to a more modern architecture without actually changing the lines of it. Unlike the one in Northern Ireland, this was to be a modern looking building, and chrome, glass and wood played a part as did it's increased height of six stories. Her squads duplicated her efforts on the interior walls and rooms, mixing thin chrome tubes with exotic looking wood paneling for hallways and reception area, and what looked like plaster walls with wood trim and panels for the guest rooms. The shield around the building was just going down when they were interrupted.

"YOU BITCH!" came the shout. Muriel and Orla turned around, and there was Darragh. "You could at least have told me that you were moving!"

"I did, Darragh. I told you a month ago. And every week after that," Orla said. "But you were so sure that it wouldn't happen because you had 'connections'."

"DON'T YOU LIE TO ME!" he bellowed. "You never told me that you were being evicted. I ended up sleeping on the street last night!"

"I'm sorry to hear that, Darragh. Why didn't you go to your apartment?" she asked.

"Why do you think I was staying at your place! They threw me out! And now I find that I can't even trust my own sister!" he said, and drew a knife out of his belt and lunged. The knife stopped a foot from Orla's abdomen, and suddenly Darragh was engulfed in a shield that held him in that position. A passing police car screeched to a halt, and the constable rushed out.

"What's going on here?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm afraid my brother's a bit overwrought," Orla said. "I'd been evicted and, even though I told him, continually, he didn't pay attention and ended up sleeping on the street last night. For some reason, he seems to feel that it's my fault instead of his own."

"And the knife?" asked the constable.

"I have NO idea why he tried to stab me, sir," Orla said.

"I see you've the Envoy training. If you'll just release him to me, I'll make sure that he's well taken care of," the constable said, and the transfer of custody was effected and information passed as to the event. And the constable waved as he pulled away.

"Nice man," Muriel said.

"They can be. Especially the trained ones, like he was," Orla said. "The ones that have the stripes, you can see them if you know where to look. They have them as a silver button over their badge. Poor Darragh. Well, he'll have a warm place to sleep for a while." And as she moved forward to enter the building, Muriel noticed a thin, red cord down the seam of the outside of her pant leg, and smiled. Looking up, she noticed that the edge of her epaulettes was also bordered in a thin, red cord, and Muriel's smile broadened into a grin. They turned right into Orla's office. This was set up similar to Muriel's original office, with the break room behind Muriel's desk and that of the on-duty squad. But the walls! They vibrated with green. Rolling landscape that looked like you could walk into it.

"Your apartment is directly above this," Carla said. "Next door is the lawyers office, then the clinic. Across the hall is the restaurant, and three shops. The first will probably be for gifts and such. The other two are actually reached from the reception area, and would be clothing shops. You have room for more shops to either side of reception. Nice decoration."

"What? Oh. Yea. My brother. Idiot tried to knife me," Orla said.

"Well, THAT certainly counts. Any problem disposing of him?" asked Carla, casually.

"Nope. A constable showed up, took one look at Darragh frozen in a shield, and took charge of him," Orla said. "Actually, I never did a thing. I was too startled. My personal shield did it all."

They continued checking out the building. Orla approved the office as it was. Particularly the three dimensional rolling Irish landscape, complete with animations. Her apartment was more like Anthony's, and that appeared to have become the new standard. The difference was in the furniture and decor. The restaurant was at least as large as Greene's, and the furniture was a bit more robust than her office and apartment, but suited it nicely. And it was already stocked with Envoy manager, cook and waiters.

Gallagher came in as they were checking out the gift shop, and they continued on from there to the clothing shops. Then it was the clinic and the manager at the main desk, and 'sample' rooms, suites, and apartments. Then back down to Orla's office, where her squads were busy gathering information on Ireland.

"Ambassador Orla . . .," he began.

"Are you that formal with Muriel?" Orla asked, smiling.

"Well, sometimes," he replied. "I suppose you want me to be casual when formal isn't

absolutely necessary.”

“It would be more pleasant,” Orla replied. “Now, what was it that you wanted to say?”

“The office next to yours. What's it for?”

“Lawyers,” Orla replied. “They'd have to be Envoy trained, of course. Muriel suggested that I get them right out of college, get them trained and the appropriate courses, then have them pass whatever tests are necessary to their position.”

“Hmm. Good point. I'm going to suggest that you let me start the recruitment,” Gallagher said.

“Any particular reason?” asked Orla.

“Simply because I was on the faculty of the leading law college, and could probably get them to accept the recruitment easier than a total stranger,” Gallagher said. “I wouldn't be doing the selecting. Just getting the word out that there were openings available for new graduates, and that you could assist them in passing the bar and such by providing courses that go beyond those found in ordinary universities. Oh, and that Envoy training would be a must.”

“Well, that certainly sounds hopeful. And helpful,” Orla said. “But what's in it for you?”

“The beginning of a core group that would be able to argue against some of the injustices in either the laws or the court findings,” Gallagher said. “It's bugged me for a long time that there are holes in the laws big enough to float the island through. And the courts are worse, finding in favor of businesses instead of consumers, constantly. It needs to be reigned in.”

“Well, I have no problem with that,” Muriel said, making it almost certain that Orla would take the offer. “And I think, in order to remain a somewhat unbiased arbiter, that it's time for me to go. I've got squads that are beginning to wonder if they still work for me, and a consort that is beginning to feel neglected,” she added, grinning. “But it's finally over. At least the worst of it. This was the major push, to get all of the isles covered with Embassies. We'll all be meeting from time to time as things come up. Perhaps sometimes jointly. But for now, Wales, Scotland and both Irelands need to find their own way of dealing with situations, as would best suit their societies.” And she said good-bye and translated out to her office.

“Done?” asked Taylor, from his recliner.

“Done,” agreed Muriel, taking her seat and making a cup of coffee. “Africa is still a mess, but seems to be cleaning itself up. Some countries have Embassies already. Others don't, but the number of trained is rising. Australia was covered by Ted, as was Canada. BOTH Russia and China offered India help, and actually worked jointly to set up an Embassy and sub-Embassies for the country. South America is still sorting out whether they want Embassies or not. Most of the Ambassadors are roving, rather than sitting in one place, but I

don't know how long that will last. So, for now, I'm done."

"So, after nine years, what will you do with your time?" asked Taylor.

"Oh, there'll be little brush fires to put out. As well as the whole network of Ambassadors to oversee for any problems THEY might have," Muriel said. "We still have problems with telemarketers and scammers, though that HAS been dying down over the years. There's legislation to lobby for – WITHOUT money being involved. There are still people to protect. It doesn't stop."

"OK, would you be willing to take on a few tasks, here?" he asked.

"Well, it depends on the tasks, and who they're for, of course," she replied. "In general I'm not adverse to the idea."

"What I'm suggesting is Public Relations. When I headed the Regiment, I never really had time for it. And Jackie is in the same position, now," he said. "But, if you could be shown to be doing things for the people – you remember the polo match – things like that. I'm going to use a term that will upset you. PLEASE wait before you blow your top. It's the sort of things that Royals do. EXCEPT – in your case you'd be doing it to push the use of Envoy training, rather than advertising the 'Royal Family'."

"Ah. I see why you thought I might blow my top. GOOD exception. And yes, I think I can do that," Muriel said. "The 'air hockey' game is one possibility. Or videos of some of the 'extras' in the extended basics, and how they're done. Hmm. Possibilities. I will definitely look into that possibility. Also, ways to do things using Envoy techniques to raise money for charities. Yes. Definitely, I'll look into it. And thanks for the suggestion."

"My pleasure. There are other things you do, too. Things that require strength and control, like swimming and tossing the caber. You do them without Envoy techniques, but the muscle training IS done with Envoy techniques," he said.

"True, but that's chancier," she replied. "You HAVE to do it checking with an Envoy style doctor all the time to be sure that you're not actually causing yourself harm. Who's this?"

"I don't know. But he's being escorted, so I've got to presume that either he has a card or the guard had GOOD reason to bring him in," Taylor said. "And who is it that he wants to see?"

"Good afternoon. My name is Edward Clarke. Would it be possible to make an appointment with the Ambassador?" the man said to Mata, after pausing for, and being claimed by, the door.

"Possible. Muriel? Are you free?" asked Mata.

"I think that can be arranged," Muriel replied. "Come in Mister Clarke."

"Thank you, Ambassador," he said, bowing some toward her. "Your Majesty," he added, with another bow.

"Take a seat. What can I do for you?" she asked.

"I'm a newspaper man, in a time when newspapers are going out of style," he replied. "To be specific, I'm a journalist that needs another profession. I'm interested in becoming an author, and I was wondering if you would mind my trying to chronicle your life up to this point."

"Brief and to the point. I notice that you have NOT had the Envoy training. Is there any particular reason why?" she asked.

"Oh, I could never see a reason to take the time," he replied. "After all, it's not like I'm someone important."

"Ah. Well, a lot of what you might come across is tied to the Envoy techniques, and you might find it beneficial to at least have the basics to be able to understand it," Muriel said. "That and, of course, what you write could only be considered an unofficial biography, since it would of necessity be slanted from the way you think, and your attitudes toward Envoys, Envoy training, and trained humans."

"I realize that, though I'd be willing to let you see it before it's published, to at least remove any glaring errors," he replied. "I know that many of your exploits were recorded, either by the media or by Envoys. And I've gathered a great deal of that from friends in the business."

"Well, that's certainly a start. But that's merely chronicling brief instances in my life, and not the thinking and planning that went into the action," she said. "Now, I'm sure that it's results that count. But it's planning and thinking, and discussing with friends and co-workers that actually shapes the results."

"Interesting point. But what's that have to do with taking the training?" he asked. "I would have thought that an outsider would have been a better person to create such a work."

"Not necessarily," she said. "And in this case, perhaps not at all. First, nothing in the training would slant your ideas. The training is too basic for that. And second, it would give you access to background material that the media never had. Thirdly, it would give you access to courses that would provide skills and knowledge that you don't already have, or have lost over time. There's a fourth reason, too. That as a trained person in an Embassy, I'd be able to get you technology that could help you for free. Admittedly, the cost outside is minimal, but the training opens up such technology to uses outside those told to ordinary humans. However, if you're opposed to being trained, then you'd have to make do with your inherent skills, resources and abilities."

"So you don't have a problem with my writing it?" he asked.

“Not really. As long as you realize that it's not an 'authorized' biography. I'm not giving it an endorsement,” she said. “However, it also doesn't stop me from providing information and resources that you don't have. I can have a suite set aside in 'The Welcoming One' for you to use as an office, or even an apartment and office. We have tablets and computers that can make writing it easier. And the room comes with servants – actually Envoys – that can help you gather material, smooth sentences, all sorts of things including simply being sounding boards to bounce ideas off of.”

“Why?”

“Why not?,” she replied. “Oh, and that's in addition to secretarial skills that will come in handy with the computer. In it's advanced state, you don't type. You just tell it what you want put down, and it does it. Then there's the Liberal Arts course geared toward writers, and the fact that we can find out the likeliest publishers for you to submit to. And making copies is easy. Really, Mister Clarke, we're not going to look over your shoulder. We just want you to be able to do the best that YOU can, and are willing to provide the tools to do it, free.”

“Oh. Oh, wow. And what's the training cost?” Clarke asked.

“Nothing. It's free, too. And includes food, clothing, shelter, medical as necessary for however long it takes,” Muriel said. “Lately, that's maybe a day at a relaxed pace. So, if you want to go find a day when you can take it – well, you might want to take a couple of days off, come to think of it. Sometimes the shock of the realization of just how big the training is gets to people, and it takes a little time to settle in. Here . . . let me put my number on my card. That way, all you have to do is call me if you're interested, and I or one of my people will come get you.”

“Oh. Thank you,” he said, somewhat dazed. “That's . . . that's far more than I expected. That's”

“Mister Clarke, did you come by car?” asked Taylor, making a cup of tea for the man.

“What? OH! No. By bus.”

“OK, why don't you sit and relax for a bit. Have some tea. I'll have one of the guards take you back to wherever you need to be in a few minutes,” Taylor said. “I think my consort ran right over the top of you. She does that, sometimes. She's not trying to be mean. She's just been doing this for so long that sometimes everything comes off rapid fire. Relax, man. And get hold of your self. See if you have any questions. Then we can see about getting you back to work, or home, or wherever you need to go.”

“Oh. Oh, thank you,” he said, then looked up, startled. “OH! I'm sorry, Your Majesty,” and started to get up.

“None of that, now,” Taylor said. “This is the office of the Leader of Home and Ambassador to earth. She out-ranks me. I'm just a visitor here. So, relax. Drink your tea. Look around. Talk to the people here and see if what Muriel's told you is the truth. Ask them

questions about your concerns. They'll answer honestly. And, when you're ready, I'll be happy to have one of the guards take you back to work or home. It's no trouble, I assure you."

It was a half hour before Edward Clarke left. Taylor and Muriel excused themselves and went to Taylor's office to wait for Mata to indicate that Clarke had managed to recover himself. In that time, Clarke looked around, noted the number of certificates on Muriel's wall, the sculptures, the three dimensional scenery – all things that in his single-mindedness to get her approval to write his book he'd overlooked – and finally talked to one of the Envoys in squad one who wandered by to check on him. Finally, he seemed to come out of his dazed state, and asked Mata if she knew what the bus schedule was. Instead, she got a member of the Regiment to come in.

::Muriel,:: Mata sent, ::Edward Clarke just left, courtesy of one of the guards. And, for once, everything is quiet. You might as well take the rest of the day off.::

"You heard?" Muriel asked.

"Yep. Just you and me, and nothing to do," Taylor said.

"Oh, I'm sure we can think of something," Muriel grinned.

Two weeks later, Clarke returned and was trained in the Envoy techniques. A year later, his first book came out. And the two subsequent books followed at approximately one year intervals.

Chapter 39

History

(Four Hundred Years Later)

In Search of the Real Muriel

An Examination of the Known Historical Events of her Life and Times

Synopsis

What follows is an attempt to determine whether there actually was this individual that seemed to single-handedly change the world. Records of such an individual exist, but questions have been raised as to whether or not she was actually one person or many. As a result, many theories have been espoused, and whole schools of thought have developed to try to explain how the changes in society took place. This paper follows none of them, but tries to answer the basic questions of her existence raised by looking at the established fact, records, and news media accounts using the most probable or least complicated hypothesis.

This investigation uses three books as a basic starting point. They were written contemporaneously to her life by Edward Clarke, outlining three pivotal periods of change. These three books contain the evidence in the form of records and news media accounts of pivotal times. The first covered a short period at the beginning of her career that shaped her personality and when she honed her skills. The second, a point where a majority of the people of earth obtained the Envoy training, about four years after the first book. The third was a period five years after the second, and covered both her relationship to the British monarch of the time and the downfall of various commercial businesses and banks.

To begin with, there seems to be some question as to where she came from. This information is out of order with the information listed in the first book, but is chronologically correct. Records of her adoption by Fred and Lilly White only show that she had been dropped off at a fire station within three days of birth under the Arizona Safe Haven law. Her birth parents were never found. Scholars have made a big thing of the 'locked room' mystery surrounding that event, even going so far as to say that Muriel was not human, but merely a construct created by Envoys to serve their purposes. No known record exists to support this thesis, and Safe Haven was common in that period. Least complicated hypothesis would indicate that the fire dispatcher was mistaken about whether the door was actually locked. Subsequent statements by the individual, herself, her adopted parents, and several other would indicate that she was a human girl. Likewise, genetic testing established that she was, in fact, human. The supporting evidence will be described in the section on her birth.

The First Book

No records of her life prior to the age of twelve exist. That was when she was apparently trained in the basic Envoy techniques, and defended herself against bullies in the

school she attended. This event, covered by news media and backed up by records from twenty one Envoys from separate points of view, established her ability to protect herself from physical attack as well as from small arms fire. It also resulted in the training of twelve friends that she'd gathered over the course of a couple of years, previous. The training of these twelve friends is an important part of the question of whether she did everything herself. She began her conquest of at least two elements of the federal government of the United States of America, and her training of a Secret Service officer that later became President at this time. The records of this conquest are somewhat incomplete, including how connections between the two departments were established, and what evidence existed because some records appear to have been designated as Top Secret by the government. There are, however, affidavits attesting to the facts listed. There is also question as to how the Secretary of State managed to die in prison, and in what way the Central Intelligence Agency was involved. But that is outside the scope of this paper.

Other events take place, including taking on the news media for not fact-checking, politicians for accepting bribes, and religions for their stand against Envoys and the techniques. In addition, businesses and religions, both, were taken to task for attempting to slant legislature in a way that would harm the population or restrict or remove the rights of the population. Many of the events of this period are sketchy and unverified, due to the lack of news media coverage or the slanting of the news by those agencies. Even the time-line is somewhat questionable. What can be established is that Muriel apparently went through a period of development, establishing her character and indicating her position on elements of society at the time as demonstrated by her actions. These actions will be examined in detail to show that they are consistent with the 'image' later projected by this young woman.

It is also somewhere in this period that Muriel is named the Leader of Home. But, beyond a flat statement that she had been and the undated certification in her passport, no record exists of exactly when, or how she was elected. This is the period of time that has so confused other researchers. A turbulent time when a great deal of action takes place, but the records are inconclusive on some of the events and the evidence needed to take action. In the section pertaining to this an attempt will be made to straighten out the time-line and explain how the events came about and were handled, despite overlaps in their occurrence. What is evident from the records of the time is that a number of people were arrested on various charges up to and including treaty violations and treason in America.

The third section of this first book starts off with the reason that some scholars question whether Muriel was actually human. A sketchy account of creating a human body and ensouling it with an Envoy is exposed. This third section of Mister Clarke's first book perhaps rightly belongs with his second book, because it contains a lot of Muriel's philosophy, such as the nature of truth. However, it does have the benefit of going into greater depth as to how Muriel had the evidence she needed to have people arrested. And need evidence she did, because she took on heads of government departments, media such as news and film, businesses, banks, politicians, religions, and judges. Such evidence gives a clearer picture of how Muriel worked and thought. It is possible that she wasn't the one directing the collection of evidence prior to this time, and that's why some areas are sketchy on how she justified her actions.

Muriel was also training at an amazing rate. And so were her students. This was the beginning of a push that really didn't take off until she was sixteen. Records of numbers trained begin to show that she was concerned with law enforcement and military advantage in America, which brings up the question of whether she actually was trying to stay neutral of national governments and interests, or whether she favored where she lived. A smaller group of scholars has suggested that it was simply because she knew the country best, and that elements of the country were attacking her and the Envoys, where the other countries weren't. It is also possible that it's similar to the 'start from the center and work out' method of learning about the world that children go through.

However, despite the possible confusion over overlapping events and their causes, a great deal of information and evidence is available for this period, including news media, Envoy records, court cases, and even records of Congressional meetings. This demonstrates that even at twelve years of age Muriel was highly intelligent and motivated, and well able to lead people. This section also has a clear record of the ability of Envoy techniques in medicine to save lives. It also provides the first evidence of the Envoy techniques in education being accredited and licensing mandated by a national government.

This was also the time period when Muriel met Taylor, who became her consort and the monarch of Britain. And it was the time when she was announced as the Outrageous Ambassador from Home. This period, as contextually light as it is, was well documented by Envoys, which raises the question of what Envoys feel is important. The meeting with Taylor was fortuitous because he was a 'breakthrough' child, suffering from hearing voices in his head that she recognized as unshielded receiving of the thoughts of others. Many scholars have concluded that this was the beginning of the relationship that blossomed into romance and finally consort-ship. That is not necessarily the case, as will be shown in the section pertaining to this, as it wasn't until Muriel was sixteen that the relationship appeared to ramp up and actually blossom. That they were friends as well as co-workers is obvious. But there was no indication of a romance there until much later in their lives.

This was also the period of time that introduces Arthur, the historian. Muriel helped to unlock his mind and give him back his memories, the latter of which took a number of years. This, too, is well documented as it served to explain more about what Envoys were and their relationship to humans. Also well documented is Taylor's becoming an Ambassador and setting up the Enclave Embassy of Britain, and Muriel's first contact with his grandmother, the Queen. Taylor went on to build and head the Regiment of Home that used outrageous procedures to echo an obscure poem, which has since been lost. Only snippets of this poem remain. Training of various people, and of various ages, is a constant through the entirety of Muriel's life and, except for exceptional situations, will be left to the reader to look up. They are mentioned in the bibliography, and the materials can be obtained on-line.

The first part of this section is a mixture of philosophy and action based on the philosophy, beginning with the nature of good and evil, or right and wrong. This deviates strongly from that established by religions previous to the advent of Envoys and the training (see Appendix one for references and citations). There is a great deal of information on fashion that is unnecessary to this account except to show that Muriel understood that having an image that was different from the ordinary helped establish her as a force to be reckoned

with. This is reinforced at a party given to show her off by contrasting her manner with that of Ted, the original Leader of Home and Ambassador to earth. His manner was the stiff and formal attitude expected in society, especially by diplomats. Hers was the softer, friendlier behavior of someone wanting to make friends. Most notable in the documentation of the party are the negative reactions of some people, and who those people were, with respect to the Envoy techniques displayed at the party. The veracity of those people is in question because of their stand concerning Home and the Envoys.

More trainees dot the records, and again one may find the information listed in the bibliography if interested. One trainee of note was General James Stuart of the American Air Force. He was instrumental in teaching Muriel to fly without mechanical aid, and she reciprocated by teaching him how to use that ability to down enemy planes by showing him a game that she and her friends had developed. The details of this are discussed, along with the implications for the future of the armed forces. Records of this are sparse among the Envoy records, but are well documented among those of that branch of the military. Muriel's attack on religion and the Embassy's purchasing of several businesses in order to take them private and find ways to make them more profitable are recorded in depth. This results in the creation of a holding company that directs the business aspects of the companies, as well as an examination of the financial records of those companies up to the time they were taken over by the American Enclave. It is also the beginning of the so called 'attacks' on religion. Later examination of her regard of religions will take place in a subsequent section of this paper.

It was also at this time that Muriel began her attack on lobbyists, banks, and on unethical lawyers. This was brought about by an attempted legal attack on Muriel and the Enclave over pulling the companies out of the stock market. Notable among the actions taken were the establishment of the general guidelines for the companies that totally violated the prior, industry wide, guidelines that generated the unethical practices that caused Muriel and Ted to take action against them. Also of note was having the Enclave's lawyers trained in the Envoy techniques to ensure their ethical behavior.

The list of actions she takes against individuals and organizations is large, and will be itemized and evidence given in the appropriate sections. Suffice it to say, here, that the list portrays a girl that is remarkably informed of events, and quite able to take action. And it is this ability to be remarkably informed that has caused scholars to question whether Muriel was one person or multiple people. The records and sources of the records are available, and this paper will show that Envoys and humans gathered the information, but that she led the investigations as well as made the decisions concerning the actions. The analysis of information was at her direction using the best means available at the time. And her ability to sort out what was important from what was merely background noise will be shown to be exceptional.

The Second Book

The second book being detailed is a period of time when Muriel was sixteen. There is some evidence that Taylor's Embassy was not the only international Embassy formed in the interval between the first and second book. Those other Embassies are not detailed beyond

a brief suggestion of their existence. However, this particular event that starts this second book is better documented as it resulted in an entire country being declared an Embassy. The evidence presented in these pages is only a small part of the records of the events as they transpired and the rest, though too long for this paper, are worth reading. This event – the protection of Russia by making a target of herself and the concurrent removal of the Peoples Republic of China as a government and turning the country into an Embassy, – and a subsequent event – involving the suppression of a large amount of funding for terrorist activities as well as the collapse of a national government – are the main thrust of the first section. It also goes into establishing what constitutes a valid government.

This section also make clear that Muriel isn't against religion, in that she doesn't care what people believe as long as they don't try to bully other people into believing the same way or use guilt to control people. This is made obvious when the leader of the Catholic church decided to try to make her feel guilty so he can control her. Her destruction of that religion is not done for religious reasons, but for ethical and personal reasons. In this section is one clear evidence, too, that Muriel does have help in getting across the realization that Envoy trained people are not helpless and defenseless. The Ambassador to China, Li Chun, proves to various British politicians that people with training can defend themselves against an aggressor. And another Ambassador is created in Russia – the eleven year old Anastasiya Khmelnytsky, a Ukrainian of Cossack descent – that immediately goes on to confound the President of Russia. And Russia joins the nations that have accepted an Ambassador and Embassy. Both these events are well documented, as will be shown in their appropriate place. Another important point in this section is that energy has a direct relationship to mass – as suggested by the famous $E=MC^2$ formula – and how that bears on the nature of Envoys, humans, and matter in general. It also shows how that connection of energy and matter was basic to the skills that she and the Envoys taught.

This next section demonstrates how Muriel can be aided by others – Envoys and trained humans – and still be the one that's instrumental in taking action and making decisions. The main record of this is from the standpoint of an American politician with which she linked during an event. Other records substantiate this position. The result of an action taken against the American Embassy for Home and Muriel, it's leader, is that another country must be stopped from its aggression. This also results in the nations of the world wanting Muriel to take care of the problem through unilateral action. Muriel first deals with the United Nations by demonstrating that they do NOT want her to be the ruler of home – the whole reason that she can't work for any one country, but must work for all of them or only for Home. Later, it results in the country of Iran being cut off from the rest of the world.

Parallel to Muriel's growth and development, but at a slower pace, her friends have been developing. Some of that development is outlined here, with evidence through records to support it. Again, it shows how Muriel works on individuals as well as large groups or countries. An example of this is Muriel's outrageous and absurd method of finding an individual leaking classified information, who he sends it to, and taking on a Congressional hearing and its chairman, which is also well documented. Another episode of development in her friends, the establishment of the Rescue and Recovery unit of home, is only given evidence by affidavit of the people involved, but shows the determination of her friends to prove themselves worthy of Muriel's friendship.

Mentioned earlier was the fact that Muriel didn't care what religion people believed in. Her objection was with people that would try to use religion as a weapon to bully others to believe as they did. Two cases stand out. The first was a clergyman of the Sunni form of Islam, who was cautioned that taking the training would lose him his religion. The other was the leader of a group of Sikhs who also received that warning. Both of them continued to ask questions and took the training despite all of Muriel's warnings. The records show that she went out of her way to make sure that they understood what would happen. A third, the Ambassador to Iran, was not warned. The reason was because she was already going through breakthrough brought on by extreme circumstances within that country.

The first attempt at mass training of humans in Envoy training wasn't started by Muriel, though it was authorized by her. That was the action figures that were put out by her friends and some of the existing Embassies. These figures were rigged to cause children close to breaking through the mind/soul barrier to make the mental connection to their soul. For most, they were simply poseable toys. But for those few that were sensitive, with breakthrough and the training, they could do various demonstrations, or even be controlled mentally. This tour de force was managed by the cooperation of several of her friends, as well as the professional expertise of the Embassy holding company and the Embassy's lawyers to establish a company to produce the action figures, and hit the shelves in a very short period of time. Discussion of this event will outline all these several disciplines, and back them up with the records.

Several times, during the course of her life, Muriel ended up in court. The evidence in her favor or against whoever was challenging her or who she challenged was always extensive. The reason for this was that Muriel was an apt pupil of an FBI agent she had trained and her lawyer. The records also show that things did not always go smoothly for Muriel. The opposition, whatever it might be, used whatever dirty tricks they could to try to derail trials for which they were defendants, or promote their cause when they were plaintiffs or prosecution. Despite opposition, Muriel prevailed because she had learned how to collect evidence from the FBI agent, and what constituted evidence from her lawyer. Transcripts of the trials or hearings were usually quite short as a result of this.

However, Muriel was noted for not taking just one line of attack with an organization that attempted to attack her. Hence, as the records show, her creation of telephone and computer companies that effectively gave away what other companies charged large sums of money for, and provided better service. Such action precipitated more action against her and the Embassy through patent and copyright litigation and lawsuits for anti-competitive behavior. Many such legal maneuverings were simply tossed out of court. Others were actually tried, only to fail miserably do to the amount of evidence against such action.

Unfortunately, one of the attempts to clean up the interlocked mess that America was at the time nearly backlashed on all of the Embassy, as well as all trained humans. This was brought about not by Muriel but by her parents getting involved in politics. The subsequent investigation demonstrated that America was no longer a Democracy, but rather was run by conflicting and competing companies. Those, in turn, were driven by the stock market which was a tool of the banks. And to add insult to the mix, the political parties were trying to kill

Envoys and those with Envoy training. It's during all of this that Jeff, a friend of Muriel's and a computer and software engineer, tells people that shields are actually semi-intelligent, and can be trained. A second bombshell comes in the form of two kittens that have adopted Ted and Muriel, and their ability to translate from one place to another, demonstrating that they are also semi-intelligent. These two events culminate in a better understanding of what shields are and how they can be controlled. This entire set of actions demonstrates, again, that Muriel doesn't try to do everything herself, but actually makes use of information from others that she can trust. This, for those that actually examine the evidence, demonstrates that Muriel is not many people, but rather one person that is willing to accept that others have ideas and information that can be effectively used.

It is also during this period that some scholars have determined that Muriel and Taylor had an ongoing relationship. Their consensus is that it is demonstrated by their evening out in elven costumes and outrageousness. In fact, as the records actually show, exactly the opposite is true. Muriel simply came to the realization that she could help a friend without it actually meaning anything special, as she and Taylor concocted an elaborate 'romance' that did not exist at that time. That there was an attraction, there, becomes evident, but it is the attraction of friends for each other, and willingness to support each other. The sole purpose was to get the media and certain politicians deflected from the rumors and lies that they'd been generating about him.

This is also the period when the training stations are set up, and the population jumps from twenty percent trained to seventy-five percent trained in several countries. Muriel has finally realized that she's simply reacting, and needs to take proactive direction to remove the cause of all the attacks and litigation against her and the Embassy. Her method, by getting more people trained, tips the balance of power from the companies and banks to the Envoy trained people. Several companies or types of companies go out of business as a result, and others change the way they do things by using Envoy techniques to create their products. This creates an environment of disruption, where 'traditional' companies are objecting to the loss of profit, and companies using the new technology are taking over the markets. Therefore, there is more litigation to try to stop the companies that are using the Envoy techniques. It also creates a situation where countries that do not have Embassies and training stations suddenly show a marked increase in trained people. These 'accidental' or 'wild' trained people are the result of friends and relatives in countries with the training stations visiting their 'homelands'. The records of Muriel's visiting some of these countries and establishing Ambassadors are extensive, and will only be touched on lightly to show that she really did try to reach out to people.

And here, at the end of this section, is where the beginnings of a romance between Taylor and Muriel takes place, finally. It starts with a polo match and goofing around, according to the records. Then moves on to a snowball fight in Arizona that results in a kiss and a half argument. It takes a certain amount of self-examination on Muriel's part, as well as some education from her mother, to finally show Muriel that it is alright to have a boyfriend. The record also shows that she went to the British Embassy and confronted Taylor, and that the result was another kiss and the ramping up of the relationship from friendship to the beginnings of a romance.

The Third Book

Book three opens with the blossoming romance, and the negative pressures on both Muriel and Taylor at the time. This results in an ultimatum on the part of Taylor aimed at his parents, his grandmother the Queen, and Parliament. Either stop the harassment or he'll take himself out of the succession. The result is that the Queen abdicates in his favor, and a large portion of Parliament is arrested on numerous charges including treason. This is where there is the best evidence that Muriel does have help, but makes the decisions, as she tells Taylor that 'she has people for that'.

The conflict with his parents isn't over, and his father accuses Taylor of forcing his grandmother out. Taylor tries to explain that that was not the case, but his father refuses to accept that, and Taylor translates to Muriel's apartment. This section, lightly recorded demonstrates the depth of feeling Muriel has for him, as she simply supports him until he can calm himself.

The procedure for the Coronation is established, and here there are better records. Not known at the time, or even during the lifetime of Muriel, is the fact that SHE crowns him in the short ceremony. But the most important part of this is that all religious symbology and approval is stripped out of the ceremony. Instead, Taylor is crowned 'by the will of the people', since no hands touched the crown before it rested on his head. This is reinforced, later, with two actions concerning the Archbishop of Canterbury of the Anglican church. The first action was the declaration that the church was no longer immune from taxes, and the second, much later, was the arrest of the Archbishop for sedition.

During this period, while waiting for Members of Parliament to be elected and take office, Taylor is forced to 'nibble around the edges' by using edicts that modify existing laws, or using the existing laws against businesses, the Anglican church, and others. Here, it can be shown that he is following Muriel's methods by having the organizations attack him, directly, thus providing him with the means to go after them and throw them out of the country and/or arrest the leaders on various charges. It also shows that he is using the same methods and procedures that Muriel used, in taking information gathered by trusted individuals and groups to provide the evidence necessary for such actions. It also shows that Muriel is not telling him what to do, though her influence in the form of attitudes and methods is evident.

There are more attacks on Muriel as she and Taylor go about the process of setting up household and offices. There are at least two attempts to have her kept out of the Palace, despite the fact that they are Consorts as attested to by Home. And here, Taylor defends Muriel by establishing the fact that HE is the one that decides who lives in the Palace, and what disposition of rooms there will be. It is during one of these episodes that Muriel tells Taylor that she will no longer push him to grow up. He's shown that he has already grown up. That doesn't stop them from discussing things, just that she will no longer apply that sort of pressure. It is also during this time that Muriel experiences homesickness or separation anxiety for the first time. And this further establishes that she is, in fact, a human. Envoys don't experience it.

There are more efforts to remove Muriel, this time from multi-national corporations that think they 'own' the King and Parliament. While Muriel is engaged in other things, Taylor takes on the judge that has been driving the attitudes of the legal system in Britain. The next appointment is with the head of the accreditation board, an abusive woman that gets shown the law of the land. This results in a meeting with the heads of universities, publishers, and licensing boards, where they are told that their opinions concerning the University of Home are wrong, and that it's the law of the land that they are accredited, and have been for nearly nine years.

There are also more events, and more people trained during this time, demonstrating the wide cross section of society that Muriel draws from. This is also the time when Home approved consort-ship is firmly established, as she presents certificates of consort-ship to four of her friends – two pairs. Another certificate is created for Taylor and Muriel, and is signed by Matthew – the male version of Mata, her security chief and spokesperson for the People of Home. Also during this period Muriel and Taylor end up taking on the construction unions and the building inspectors over the building of a Guest House for the poor and destitute in London.

The second section of the third book opens with the finding and training of one of Muriel's strongest tools. Ralph Cramdon, who becomes the 'Crown Special Investigator' and heads five squads that are terrors for getting information and evidence against individuals and companies that are breaking the law and think that they are above it. The first major action he precipitates is against a Private Equity firm that is engaging in illegal computer generated buying and selling, and the funds of which are skimmed off and going to fund terrorists. This results in about half of Muriel's friends establishing a new office, the Rescue and Recovery Unit of Home, in the building that used to house the headquarters of the Private Equity firm.

Another event is the training of a paraplegic man – the son-in-law of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police department. This goes to show that Muriel doesn't try to do everything, but actually relies on others to do their own job. It also demonstrates that others add to the massed knowledge that the Envoys have, as well as providing information to Muriel and Taylor, both. Muriel does not work in a vacuum, but works with the tools available at the time. Rob Howell, no longer a paraplegic, goes on to take over the station in the Kidbrooke area of London, and ends up starting the resource squads that go around using Envoy techniques to fix up flats and buildings. An effort that helps to change the image of the Metropolitan police. He also establishes himself as a force to be reckoned with.

Muriel is not infallible. When she dives into her soul to get information directly from Home instead of going through her security chief, she's overwhelmed, and the shock causes ALL her friends and hundreds of Envoys to show up. But Mata manages to bring her out of it. This event is very well documented in Envoy records, and again shows that she's human. Muriel takes on the problem of Envoy trained doctors not being able get work, and Taylor parallels it with taking on the insurance companies that refuse to make payments to them. This ends up in a massive war where the insurance companies are taken over by Home, and the Envoy trained doctors are established in 'neighborhood' offices. The combined efforts of Taylor and Muriel are effective. But it was a massive fight, and an astounding effort on both their parts according to the accounts and records.

The third section starts off with the major push to break all the banks. Primarily British and American banks are listed in the records available. Ralph has come up with a massive amount of links between them, and links to terrorist organizations around the world. He takes the section on America to Ted's analysis squad, and they feed it into their computers, resulting in America having even more information than before. During the same period is when the Archbishop makes the mistake of pressuring an elected but not yet seated Member of Parliament to get Taylor to get rid of Muriel. This is the time when the Archbishop is arrested for sedition.

The next day is the opening of Parliament, and again, Taylor breaks with tradition by not being part of a procession. In full display but with wings furled, he lays it on the line that he won't tolerate outside pressure on Parliament. He does offer them a way out, though. If they don't feel that he's doing a good job, take it to the people and have them vote on it. If he loses, he'll leave. However, there's a catch – if they lose, they will no longer be Members of Parliament. It's a vote of confidence both ways. This is recorded in Envoy style records, as well as documented in the minutes of the first session of Parliament for his reign.

Muriel then begins an effort to get Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales made more comfortable with Envoy techniques, and starts with Wales. The records of this time make it look something like a comedy of errors, but she manages to find and train an Ambassador, but defers building an Enclave or Embassy for her until the young lady finishes college. Then it's on to Scotland, and there she runs into the same problems with 'traditional' thinking and building codes. She and the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament team up to break that possible deadlock. She finds a 'street kid' that cares about the poor and that has the ability to think and trains him and makes him the Ambassador to Scotland, and the Enclave and Embassy are built without too much hassle. Arrests are made, particularly in the corporate world, and a second young man is trained and joins the Embassy. These records are remarkably complete, and the media agreement with them is even more remarkable.

Taylor decides that it's his turn, and takes on Northern Ireland, and runs into a problem right off the bat. The problem is another 'Taylor' in Ireland that is the mouthpiece for a consortium of companies that are also in America. Muriel handles the interrogation of the man to find out this information. Muriel then turns around and finds someone to make into the Ambassador to Northern Ireland. There is enough major power that's trained in Northern Ireland to make this a fairly easy Embassy, and she finds a location owned by an ex-member of the Regiment of Home to turn into a mini-enclave. This is also the second time that Rob shows up. He's been elevated to Captain, and has taken over the Chief Inspector's office, and is laying down the law. Numerous arrests take place, based on information that Ralph has assembled.

It's on to the Republic of Ireland for Muriel, and once the initial resistance by the head of the legislature, there, is taken care of, things move along very quickly. The son of the head of the legislature is a 'breakthrough' child, and Muriel is able to help him complete the breakthrough. As a result, the boy's father also becomes trained. Numerous arrests are made in the legislative body and outside it, and the scene is set for a much more peaceful future. An Ambassador is chosen and trained for the position, and an Embassy created for

her.

The book breaks off at this point. But the records up to this time are clear. Muriel is one person, human, and supported by other remarkable people. She doesn't try to do it all, but accepts input from Envoys and trusted humans, expecting them to do their job, and simply guiding the direction and making decisions, herself. Part of her mystique is because of her outrageous behavior learned early in her career, and partly because of the remarkable education she's had in trying to understand where the problems were and how to deal with them. The records, when taken as a whole, all lead to this conclusion. It's only when they are separated from each other or taken out of context that the possible alternative conclusions can be reached.

MURIEL: THE LEGEND OF A GIRL

Preface

What follows is an apocryphal account purporting to be the actual words of a contemporary of a person known as Muriel. This person is believed to have been real by many people. Yet no records exist in our history of her actually having existed. Rather, the person known as Muriel may have been a fictitious person constructed to explain a turbulent time in history, approximately two thousand years ago, by those that needed a focal point for the many changes in human civilization that took place at the time.

Efforts to establish the dating of the document have so far failed, due to the unusual composition of the medium on which it was written, and the archaic language used. All that has been established is that it was found in an apparently man-made cave in the Western portion of the Superstition Mountains of Arizona in the United States of America by someone seeking the location of the 'Lost Dutchman Gold Mine'. Its continued existence is attributed to its having been crudely sealed in a pottery urn.

While many cults exist purporting to know 'the truth about Muriel', all of them seem to be in agreement that this work must be a fake. Their reasoning is that, if it were true, then the basis of their belief would be false. As a result, it has been denied a part of the canonical works of those cults, thus not widely known. Likewise, the scientific world, being unable to establish its history, has downplayed it. Thus it is relatively unknown to the general public. It's publication, here, is simply because it is a curiosity.

The Good News According to Bartholomew

{1:1} She was born of no parents, but rather created and endowed by the Envoys of Home.

{1:2} For in the beginning were the Envoys, and the Envoys were with her, and the Envoys were her.

{1:3} She was found in the winter, in a locked room in a building under the sign of Engine 41, Phoenix Fire Department.

{1:4} And none could discover this mystery, for there were none around to have left her on the dispatcher's desk.

{1:5} It came to pass that, in that time, there were a couple that often took in children to nurture and protect until people of good will could be found to take them.

{1:6} And so it was that Fred and Lilly White took the child and did nurture and protect her.

{1:7} And it came to pass that this childless couple did desire to end that state, and made an application to adopt her, and called her Muriel.

{1:8} So it was that the child grew and learned from this couple – and they helped to form the personality of the young woman to be.

{1:9} But all was not well with Fred and Lilly, for they were diagnosed with incurable diseases, and were distracted in their care of Muriel.

{1:10} So it was that she was enrolled in a school that frowned on what appeared to be weakness in children, and fostered an atmosphere of bullying.

{1:11} But Muriel was not deterred, and gathered about her friends that she tried to nurture and protect.

{1:12} Thus it was that, in her twelfth year, she had twelve friends that looked to her for comfort and leadership, and she was frustrated and discouraged, for she could not help them more.

{2:1} There was in that time an Enclave of Envoys dedicated to the training of humans in the techniques that the Envoys were.

{2:2} And the leader of this group was named Ted, and he was full of rage, but of a controlled nature.

{2:3} And he did try to get the information out to humans, but was thwarted by the attitudes of the people of the time.

{2:4} Yet he persisted, and it came to pass that he was asked to be a substitute teacher for a class, for their regular teacher was ill and could not continue for a day.

{2:5} And in this class was the young Muriel, and some of her friends, and they languished in misery from the attitude of the school and the behavior of the bullies.

{2:6} And Ted did ask the young girl to stay after school, that he might determine a way to help her with her school work.

{2:7} And she did slouch and throw herself into a chair, for she was of the opinion that he was going to bully her about her poor grades.

{2:8} But, he did see something in her that gave him pause, and he confessed that he was not what he seemed, but was an Ambassador for the People of Home.

{2:9} And this did intrigue her, as did the presentation of his passport seemingly from out of the air.

{2:10} So, therefore, did he call his friend Matthew, that was an Envoy, and request that one be found to train her, for he was not comfortable dealing with young girls.

{2:11} And Matthew, who was called Matt, did change his form to be less intimidating to Muriel, and did enter the room as a female of the same age as the girl.

{2:12} And Matthew did say, "Hi, I'm Matt . . . uh."

{2:13} And Muriel did reply, "Hi, Mata, I'm Muriel."

{2:14} Thus was Mata named, she that would be Muriel's guide and guard, protector and nurturer, and constant companion for the rest of her days.

{2:15} Now, Mata threw Ted out of the room that there should be no tension between he and Muriel as Mata attempted to train the young girl.

{2:16} But still was the young Muriel suspicious, and refused to allow Mata to connect to her mind.

{2:17} Instead did she insist that she try, first, to make the connection, and it was good.

{2:18} And Mata did swear at Ted and order him to return, for Muriel was overwrought from the experience, for she had just performed her first miracle alone.

{3:1} Ted did return, and praised the young girl and her new mentor for their efforts, and plans were laid to take her to the Enclave to

teach her more, and this was a good Friday.

{3:2} So it was that Muriel and her parents were brought to visit the Enclave the next day with all pomp and ceremony, and some little humor that made it easier on her parents.

{3:3} And Muriel was separated from her parents by a squad of Envoys, that she might begin her training in the Envoy techniques.

{3:4} And Muriel did learn all that she could learn from three of her squads, first about finding her power and creating shields, then about creating clothes for herself that did not require mending or cleaning.

{3:5} Thus it was that her second miracle occurred, for her shields were nothing like those of the Envoys, but were stronger and more easily formed, and withstood the force of five .45 caliber bullets at close range.

{3:6} And she did lead three squads back to a lunch room for lunch, and was amazed at the number of people lining the street to see her and cheer, for she felt herself to just be a normal girl and nothing special.

{3:7} But in those times there was a man that felt himself so important that others should defer to him in all things, and he was ordered to give Muriel the notice of acceptance of her status as Ambassador to the people of America.

{3:8} And he did visit the Enclave and make an ass of himself with his pompous and overbearing ways, and was humiliated by Muriel, for she could not abide bullies any longer.

{3:9} Thus began her mission of teaching bullies of all sorts the error of their ways.

{3:10} And her training continued through

that day, and a plan was laid out for dealing with the bullies in her school.

{4:1} But on Sunday, she rested, and it was good.

{4:2} And on Monday morning she went to school dressed in a white blouse and yellow flowered jumper, for to cause the bullies to be attracted to her to do their mischief.

{4:3} And Muriel did hold the bullies off, without appearing to notice their behavior, yet she managed to engulf them in shields from which they could not escape.

{4:4} And the Principal of the school did shoot at her, to no effect, for Muriel's behavior was anathema to the woman for she had been ordered to keep Muriel and her friends down.

{4:5} And the police did come and arrest the bullies, teachers and Principal, and Muriel was much made of by the media for her ability to hold off and contain the bullies.

{4:6} And on Tuesday morning did Muriel cause her friends from school to be brought to Enclave to see what she had been doing.

{4:7} And they were amazed at some of the things they saw, and Muriel endeavored to teach them what she knew, even though she wasn't completely trained, herself, and she did succeed.

{4:8} And this was the beginning of her other great mission – to train people in the Envoy techniques and encourage them to use them in their daily lives.

{4:9} And the friends of Muriel became, also, Ambassadors and in later years would be renowned for their works.

{5:1} So it was set that her two great missions were established, and she grew in her knowledge of her abilities and of society, and did work to eliminate the bullies of the world by training people in the Envoy techniques in order to protect themselves.

{5:2} And her abilities increased as she revised the training to make it simpler and as her knowledge of the techniques expanded.

{5:3} For she learned how to walk on air and fly with the birds, and did train others in the practice, and this was another great miracle.

{5:4} And she did feed the multitude of people drawn from an American Embassy under siege.

{5:5} And she did ever examine herself and her thoughts and relate them to others that they might benefit from her conclusions.

{5:6} She was the stalwart protector, seeking out the bullies in society and finding legal ways to put them away, that they should no longer bother the ordinary people.

{5:7} And she did train the mighty and the lowly, equally, and with humor, for she was just a child and was oft heard to say, “**And what do kids do? Kids Kid!**”

{5:8} And she did treat everyone the same way, puncturing the egos of the mighty and building up the egos of the lowly, for she held with no formality unless someone was about to be put down, royally.

{5:9} For it was during this period that she met a Prince of Britain and treated him like an ordinary boy, much to his shock and pleasure.

{5:10} And she did treat lowly enlisted men as people of worth, and did train them in techniques that she had learned and

developed.

{5:11} For with those that would threat with her in friendship and respect she used only her first name, but those that were overly impressed with themselves and their position, she used her titles, just before they were taken to task for their bullying behavior.

{5:12} And she did show that she was human and capable of killing, where necessary, even to eliminating Envoys that had become rogues and were so evil that they glowed black.

{5:13} Yet she had such compassion that those that were willing to learn and change, she saved and taught, even those that had been against her and all humans.

{5:14} And she did judge, because judgment is built into human beings, but did not judge in the sense of condemning either humans or Envoys for what they were, but only for how they behaved, and they were given the choice of changing and demonstrating that they were worthy of her regard.

{6:1} And lo, when she was sixteen, came a mighty country to try to put her in her place, and it was a country feared by others for its military might and economic impact.

{6:2} But Muriel, in her strength of purpose, saw through their machinations and did sorely treat with them, inflicting shame on those that termed her an unlettered cow and demanded that she get her master.

{6:3} For she laughed at their petty antics because she was the Leader of Home, and had no master.

{6:4} And she did send them back to their government stripped and bound, that their shame might be known to those mighty in their evil intent.

{6:5} It was in their shame that such men replied with deadly missiles of nuclear material, and the missiles were destroyed, and the country then lost its ability to do more violence for another title of hers was Marshal of the Forces of Home.

{6:6} There was much weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth in the halls of governance of that country, for they now had naught to use to control their people, and many were those that would rise up against them.

{6:7} And Ted did call upon Home to protect the countries around it, that they might not be overrun with fearful people fleeing such destruction, and a mighty wall was built about the country by beings fifty feet tall that turned back the mass.

{6:8} And one of the beings took pity on a woman and child, and taught her the Envoy techniques, though it might have counted against him, and the woman was chosen to become the first Ambassador to that defenseless country.

{6:9} And Muriel did praise the being, which was the woman's brother though he thought she knew it not, and did ask him to become her security chief, that she might do mighty works in their country and bring peace to the people, and the woman did move to destroy the now ineffective government of China, for in their evil they refused to acknowledge that lowly Li Chun was now more powerful than they.

{6:10} And in another country, Muriel raised one that was of tender years to be the Ambassador even though the country had not made treaty with Home or acknowledged that they ever would.

{6:11} So it was that Anna Khmelnytsky became the first Cossack to become an

Ambassador, and that to the people of Russia, and the President of Russia knew not what to do about her or with her.

{6:12} Now it came to pass that a religion, mightier than most, rose up against her and its leader demanded that she confess her sins and become a dutiful daughter of the church.

{6:13} But Muriel was not of that faith, and knew the truth about Home and it's lack of a divine being, and she did return the prelate to his palace, and did declare that, "No mere human has the authority of god to judge the works of others. No mere human has the authority to tell others what to think. You will be judged in Home."

{6:14} And she did grow and wings did spring from her back and a flaming sword appeared in her hand, and she did drive that sword through the papal throne that it should never be used again.

{7:1} Others there were, too, that would try to bring down this child that felt she was just doing a job, and one of them was not just a nation but a nation ruled by a religion.

{7:2} And the President of Iran railed against her, for she was merely a girl child and in their culture was as nothing and only meant to provide children until she died of it.

{7:3} But Muriel saw through his designs, as well as those of the countries of the world that would have her solve their problems for them.

{7:4} And she did rise up and show the countries of the earth what would happen should she become the Dictator of Earth, for she sought out the lying pipsqueak and did strip him and tie him to a rack, and did whip him for his lies and then send him back to his master.

{7:5} Yet, during this time, one came to Muriel of the same faith as the one she had whipped, but of a different sect, and she did treat with him honestly and gently, and did train him in the Envoy techniques, for he was one that sought knowledge and truth rather than corruption and lies.

{7:6} And she did give him a job and a place at her left hand, to document the religions of the world and how they did good, and how they did evil.

{7:7} Yet was Iran still a mess, for though Muriel had caused a mighty wall to encompass it that none might cross its borders, still there was vast violence in the country, and the people were fearful.

{7:8} And it was from this fear that one was born to become the Ambassador to the country, for her soul had tried to protect her from the violence of men, and yet she fought it and feared it for she thought it something from outside her.

{7:9} But Muriel, in her wisdom, discovered the place where the woman dwelt, and brought her out and taught her many wondrous things, and gave her a purpose that she might be mighty in that country.

{7:10} Other things there were that went on at that time, for some of her friends had found jobs, and some had not, and one was at a cusp of maturity.

{7:11} And so it was that Jeff was put in charge of software companies and automobile manufacturers as the head of the companies, and he did grow into his new status with humor and humility.

{7:12} Others of Muriel's friends also found jobs that they wanted to do, helping others by rescuing them or bringing them out of impossible situations.

{7:13} And Marcia headed them, and they proved mighty indeed against those that would use innocent people as a shield for their nefarious deeds, for Marcia was a super-cop.

{7:14} Yet there were others that came to seek knowledge from Muriel, and try to determine what she was, though she often said, "I'm just a girl doing a job."

{7:15} So it was that a Sikh Warrior came to Muriel to learn, and after cautioning him that he'd lose his religion, she did train him, and he understood.

{7:18} Then it was that Muriel stumbled on a way to increase the number of people that were trained, and did agree to have action figures put out that showed her and her friends at twelve, and that the set should be called 'Ambassadors All' that there should be no differentiation between them.

{8:1} And there was in that time a great outpouring of grief and suffering, for it was election time and the candidates did contest on television with lies and distortions enough to drive the population to strong drink to relieve the pain of it.

{8:2} Yet that wasn't enough, for they also polluted the roadways with signs proclaiming that they should be the ones elected, and not the others.

{8:3} But the worst shame came when it was found that her parents were running in an election – against each other.

{8:4} Yet good came of it, for it was discovered that there really was only one party, and that would best be described as the party of the multi-national and powerful companies that contributed vast funds to

politicians to weight laws in their favor.

{8:5} And Muriel saw that this was bad, and did cause her analysis team to investigate them, and found where the corruption was.

{8:6} But there was more to their nefarious plan, for the parties planned to kill all the Envoys and Envoy trained people, and Muriel tried to find where and when the initial test of their weapon would be, but she was too late, for the leaders of the local party killed themselves testing it.

{8:7} It was at that time that another problem arose, and from an unexpected direction, for two kittens that they had taken in had discovered how to translate from one place to another, and thus show that they, too, were semi-intelligent, like the shields that Jeff used to make phones and computers.

{8:8} Yet still things went on that needed their attention, and the ones that plotted to kill them were arrested in the CIA building, yet the President thought that Muriel killed the people in the desert that had the weapon.

{8:9} But despite all this turmoil, Muriel found time to help a friend, and so it was that she and Taylor have a dinner date in Britain, and they did go as Oberon and Titania, the King and Queen of the Elves.

{8:10} And their ruse was successful, for the newspapers no longer said that Taylor had something wrong with him that he could not be with a woman.

{8:11} And out of discussion with her parents and friends came the realization that she'd simply been chasing events, instead of going to the cause.

{8:12} And from this came the realization that more of the population needed to be trained, that the companies would not have

as much power over the politicians and population.

{8:13} And the idea of training stations was born, and the idea took shape and form, and was initiated in all countries where there was an Enclave.

{8:14} Thus was born the massive work of organizing and training the people of the world, some of whom have gotten their training wild, from others, and knew not what all of it meant.

{8:15} But Muriel was not deterred, and began going to the countries without an Enclave, and finding the wild ones, and helping them to understand what it was all about.

{8:16} And the Leader of Home and the Prince of Britain discover that there was more to their friendship than just horsing around, and the aftermath of a polo match was a snowball fight, and a kiss that seemed to be heard around the world.

{8:17} Thus it was that Envoys and humans, both, realized that she WAS a young woman and human, and subject to all the same fears and joys that humans go through as they grow.

{9:1} Yet still the pressures mounted, and Taylor was overwrought with the insistence of Parliament, the Queen, and his parents that he either subjugate Muriel through marriage, or find a decent girl.

{9:2} Yet, their romance had grown, and Taylor refused to accept either solution that had been handed to him, and threatened to remove himself from the line of succession, thus ending the Monarchy in Britain.

{9:3} This was the first great trial of Taylor, and his Grandmother, the Queen, abdicated in favor of him, thus ending the confrontation between them.

{9:4} So it was that Parliament was arrested for taking bribes from companies to foster laws that only benefited those companies, and other treasonous acts, and Taylor was declared King by the majority of the people of Britain.

{9:5} Yet the way was not smooth for the new monarch, as various individuals and groups attempted to take control of him for their own purposes, and Muriel supported his efforts to remain true to his own self-image and purpose by providing evidence of the wrong-doing of the companies and others.

{9:6} The coronation of Taylor followed no ceremony of the past, for Muriel had said that *“when tradition becomes a straight jacket, it's time to put it aside for something new.”*

{9:7} And, because of that, numerous groups and people accelerated their attempts to control Taylor, but Muriel's information on such groups and people resulted in the downgrading or removal of such as the Anglican Church, and several companies.

{9:8} Education and medicine also came under fire, as Universities, publishers, and licensing agencies attempted to control how people learn and how they are treated for disease, and whether they can practice their professions, but to no avail, for none could stand against Muriel's knowledge of their nefarious acts.

{9:9} And still Muriel found and trained people – some to improve their daily lives and some to greatness – and overturned various attempts to remove or kill her and Taylor.

{9:10} And so it happens that, because of her training others, she saw a need for a great building to be built to house those just trained, and those that had been assailed by poverty and depression.

{9:11} And thus it was that there existed a building in the shape of the upper torso of a woman and the wings of a bird, and inside was a sculpture that depicted Muriel in the same pose welcoming all who needed help and rejecting those that would do harm.

{10:1} But there were those that would still do harm to Muriel, and they began what appeared to be a disinformation campaign against her.

{10:2} Yet no direct evidence was available to tie individuals or corporations to this scheme, and it was thought that they were once operations officers of the CIA in America, hired by corporations to keep her off base and out of the way while something else was to happen.

{10:3} Now in that time there were financial institutions that managed to control many companies, even to those large multi-national ones, by the clever device of buying shares of stock and selling them.

{10:4} And Ralph, named as 'Crown Special Investigator' found that banks begat Private Equity, that begat Hedge Funds, and that the unregulated nature of Private Equity was such that much could be hidden that should have been caught by the stock market regulators.

{10:5} And Ralph did notice that members of the board of directors of the banks he was investigating were on the board of directors of a Private Equity firm, and he was wroth to realize the damage that it was doing to the market.

{10:6} And he did realize that the stock market, itself, was actually run by the banks, for they were the ones with the money to control it.

{10:7} And a great action was taken by Muriel and Taylor to remove this threat from Britain, that it might not blight the economy of the people of Britain.

{10:8} And so it was that Muriel had friends around her again, for Marcia had understood her feeling of loss and separation, and had conspired to move to Britain to bolster her spirits, and took over the building that had housed the Private Equity.

{10:9} So revitalized by her friend, Muriel looked at the nature of the attacks on her and Taylor, and realized that it'd been the banks all along that drove the corporations and even some religions to attempt to do away with her.

{10:10} And Muriel discovered that insurance companies, meant to relieve the economic losses due to illness or accident, greatly behaved as the banks, in that they were willing to take in money but wroth to let it go back to those that gave it.

{10:11} So too, were they forcing licensing boards and hospitals to forgo the use of doctors trained in Envoy techniques of medicine, thus depriving people of cures for incurable diseases and keeping the costs of medical care high, where the insurance companies could hide some of their machinations.

{10:12} Yet what they were doing was illegal, as the licensing boards had been ordered by law to accept such Envoy trained doctors, and they had ignored it because the insurance companies were paying them to.

{10:13} And Muriel did break their

stranglehold on the people of Britain by having Home buy up the insurance companies, and hire the Enclave trained doctors at a salary to care for the population.

{10:14} And Muriel did cause a great hiring of doctors, and placed one above them as spokesperson and Ambassador, and it was good.

{11:1} Yet still the banks of the world fought back, because the rich do not willingly part with their riches, and they used insurance companies in other countries, and various nefarious legal means to attempt to recapture their dominance of the people.

{11:2} And Ralph saw the international connections of deceit, and did dig deeper and share his information with the analysis team that Ted had, and more links were made in order to take them all down, together.

{11:3} And Taylor did let the new Parliament know that there was to be no hanky-panky in that august body, and that they were to be responsible for their actions, under law.

{11:4} And Muriel did see that she was free, now, to travel to other countries in the realm, and search out likely Ambassadors who had the strength of character and intelligence to handle the position.

{11:5} So it was that she traveled to Wales and did cause some disturbance with their legislature, but to good cause as she found her Ambassador and trained her in the way of all her Ambassadors and turned her loose to do what she felt was right for the country.

{11:6} And she did travel to Scotland, where a street kid impressed her with his charity to those in poverty, and did make him an Ambassador, and he did take an apprentice

one that had shot at him, and befriended him, and they worked well together.

{11:7} But Taylor was not to be outdone by his consort and love, and did go to Northern Ireland to make his presentation, only to be thwarted by those of the education profession and licensing board that wanted to keep things the way they were.

{11:8} And it was with Muriel's help that those institutions did come under fire for their attempt to control and limit education, and one that had been a professor was asked to become the Ambassador.

{11:9} So it was that the University and licensing board were closed down, and the property and name purchased by Home, and reopened with new professors that actually taught the courses they were meant to teach.

{11:10} And Muriel did travel to the Republic of Ireland that is usually just called Ireland, and did rescue the child of the legislative leader who was fighting the connection with his soul.

{11:11} And this did cause a reversal in the attitude of the leader of the legislature, so that the legislature, called the Dail and Seanad, was put on notice that there would be no more slanting of laws for the benefit of businesses of any sort.

{11:12} And an Ambassador was selected, one that was close to poverty and evicted from her apartment, and who happened to be the sister of the secretary to the leader of the legislature, he that had been fired for losing appointments that the leader had made, and substituting those of people that wanted to control him.

{11:13} And so the great work ends for Muriel, that she establish a peace on the world through knowledge and training, and

eliminate the bullies, at least the major ones, and from here her ministry continues in smaller ways, reaching out to the poor and hopeless and giving them hope.

{11:14} These are the words of Bartholomew, that Envoy that was called Bart and who was the security chief for Ambassador Ted of America.



Meet the Author

Craig A. Eddy

I'm 67, retired and proud of it. I live in a science fiction world. When I was 14, I wanted a computer that would do the things the room sized ones could do, but would fit in a briefcase. I was thinking small. What I ended up with a few years later was one that could do those things and fit in my shirt pocket. And it's just gotten better. I've been a CAD operator (18 1/2 years) and a number of other things in my life, and now I write fantasy novels for my own amusement using a computer with no paid software on it. All free. Even the operating system (Linux).

Currently writing Fantasy books that are available as PDF files under Creative Commons License.

Bragging rights:

I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy a B.A. in BS